Erik On Avoidance

By ERIK JOHNSON

WRITINGS ABOUT MOLD AVOIDANCE
2000-2015
“Erik on Avoidance”

By Erik Johnson

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For more information about the role of mold toxins in chronic multisystem disease, please visit the Paradigm Change website.

www.paradigmchange.me
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Glossary
Foreword

One stranger’s comment to me in early 2012 sparked my interest, which led to an eye-opening new understanding of medicine and the world.

After I had said in my online videos how important it always is for sufferers of ME/CFS to rest, Erik Johnson asserted that actually sometimes, these desperately ill patients could do things, even exercise.

More specifically, he said that in some places, some people with ME/CFS don’t experience those awful post-exertional crash symptoms after everything they do.

Erik and Lisa Petrison have generously spent countless hours talking to me about the Locations Effect and about toxic mould reactions - both of which I have experienced myself, and have witnessed in hundreds of people I’ve known with ME/CFS.
For decades, Erik has devoted his life to telling everyone who’d listen, about what he has found out, and about the famous outbreak of severe M.E at Tahoe which was given the new and unique, but unhelpful, name “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome”.

As far as I am aware, Erik has never said that mould causes ME/CFS. But, critically, he does say that an effect from certain moulds was present at the start of CFS.

In just three or four years, I have seen the numbers of people taking online about what Erik says, and putting it into practice, go from dozens, to hundreds, to thousands.

Many of these people literally owe their lives to Erik. Very many more thank him that they have some restored quality of life. Dr. Ritchie Shoemaker had already recognised Erik’s astonishing discoveries as a “mold warrior” some years earlier.

In an age when anecdotal evidence (even overwhelming evidence) is often scoffed at, ME/CFS researchers and doctors have not, to date, been quick to join the dots of the science which already exists. Hopefully now, though, the tide is turning.

Erik is a true scientist. He observes. He tests, frequently to his own cost and pain. He reports, truthfully, on what he finds. And he cares deeply about those people whose suffering is unimaginable to most of the world.

In my many long conversations with him, he has always been straightforward and clear, never opaque, and never frustrated that I’d forgotten some of the biology he’d already explained to me, slowly, three times before!

Since I have been “avoiding mould” (albeit not as “extremely” as some have to), my recovery suddenly improved in one big step.

And I find that with “crashes” or temporary relapses of M.E symptoms that I have - which I would previously have put down to overdoing it, or coming down with a virus or bug, or even too much stress, - I can actually very easily trace most of them to “bad” or mould toxic environments that I’ve been in and not decontaminated from.

My first piece of advice to everyone with ME/CFS always used to be to rest.

Now, my top advice for everyone with ME/CFS is to rest while you need to, and to listen to Erik.

Giles Meehan
Felixstowe, England
GetWellFrom.ME.UK
Introduction

Erik Johnson became aware of the negative effects of toxic mold on his health in the early 1970's as a student at Truckee High School in the Lake Tahoe area of California.

Erik then served as a nuclear missile launcher specialist in the U.S. Army in the mid 1970's, receiving intensive training in how to deal with encounters with hazardous substances such as nerve gas or nuclear radiation.

He and many of his fellow soldiers became ill in 1976 after being exposed to a large amount of black mold in an old bunker in Germany.

Erik returned to northern California in the late 1970's and worked as a hang gliding instructor. He remained reactive to indoor mold, and he also began to notice severe effects on his health as a result of outdoor toxins in 1980.

In 1984, Erik became ill with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (eventually referred to as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome by the U.S. government) in the Lake Tahoe epidemic of the disease. He was one of the first patients to be examined by outbreak physicians Dr. Paul Cheney or Dr. Daniel Peterson.
In August 1985, immediately subsequent to an encounter with a moldy log, his illness level became severe.

Erik recovered part of his health as a result of moderate mold avoidance in the late 1980's and was able to resume working. He also became a pilot and built experimental airplanes.

But eventually he relapsed.

In 1998, Erik decided to use the training in bioweapons protocols that he had learned in the Army to begin to avoid even tiny amounts of cross-contamination from mold toxins.

As a result, he went from being almost bedridden to climbing Mt. Whitney (the highest mountain in the contiguous U.S.) within six months.

Since then he has continued to work full-time and to exercise vigorously on a regular basis, living in the Reno/Tahoe area.

Erik has spent most of his free time since 2000 helping scientists to understand the role of toxic mold in chronic multisystem disease as well as educating other sufferers with regard to using his avoidance techniques to improve their own health.

The details of his life are summarized in the book *Back from the Edge*.

The details of his mold-avoidance approach are summarized in the book *A Beginner’s Guide to Mold Avoidance*.

Erik also wrote chapters in two of Dr. Ritchie Shoemaker’s books on toxic mold illness: Chapter 23 (“Mold at Ground Zero for CFS”) in *Mold Warriors* and Chapter 17 (“The Novice Pilot: CFS and Other Medical Mistakes”) in *Surviving Mold*.

More information about Erik (including how to obtain the books mentioned above) is on this page of the Paradigm Change website:

[www.paradigmchange.me/erik](http://www.paradigmchange.me/erik)
Chapter 1

Overview

THE JOHNSON PROTOCOL

> Can someone tell me what the Johnson Protocol is?

"Feel mold.... run like hell, decontaminate before the immune system goes ballistic."

"Don't carry it home, particularly not where you sleep."

"If you feel mold in your sleeping place, it's not a place where you can sleep."

That's the basic idea. Pulling it off is the tricky part.

-Erik (2009)
A VERY ODD KIND OF RECOVERY

I am working, but I am neither healthy nor living a normal life.

The weird thing about my situation is that my immune profile is still completely shattered, yet as long as I avoid this one stupid thing that mysteriously showed up in Incline Village in 1985, I can climb mountains.

If I fail to practice an extraordinary level of avoidance, I fall apart within days. So it's a very odd kind of recovery.

I am forced by this weird illness to spend my time hiking, biking, climbing mountains, seeing beautiful pristine places, and avoiding the toxic plumes which are rampant in "civilidevastation."

Still, it beats being dead or disabled. I've managed to get a lot of life back, much more than I dared hope for.

-Erik (2011)

*

The hidden devices and impossible logistics required to pull off this concept are so fantastmic as to be utterly unreasonable.

-Erik (2011)

SURVIVAL PROTOCOLS

I was fortunate to have Army training in biowarfare survival protocols.

When I realized the "stuff" was traveling with me much as the CS gas we used as a simulant, my training kicked in.

I set up an isolation area, a decontamination facility, and worked to protect my safe zone in exactly the way the military taught me.

The concept is simple, but the application is the very devil.

Shower and keep contaminated clothing/objects outside of the safe zone.

I take off my clothes inside. Right next to the door.

Then I throw my clothing outside into a bucket and take an immediate shower.
In the Army, the decon facility would be separate, but this was the best I could do.

The bucket I drop them into is filled with water, so it's as quick as possible.

It seems that the longer clothes stay contaminated, the harder they are to clean. Immediacy appears to be more effective.

If an object is contaminated, I just plain don't bring it inside.

Even after all the years I've been doing this, I'm still in shock over it. That such a bizarre thing would ever become necessary.

-Erik (2011)

* 

The absolute first thing the instructors said to us in biowarfare training is that humans respond by trying to "invent their way out of it."

Which is what all this focus on genetic susceptibility looks like to me.

We were taught to avoid such thinking.

"Detect Evacuate and Decontaminate... or you are DEAD."

Army loves its acronyms.

-Erik (2015)

* 

I am totally against the idea of modifying us to fix this.

A 25% rate of susceptibility is not some kind of rare disease.

That is what we would call within the range of normal.

Our pets are sick.

I suppose they all have a genetic predisposition too?

One that was so rare that this was unknown before but now is widely reported?

It's the toxins that aren't supposed to be here.
That is what we need to focus on.

-Erik (2015)

PERCEPTION, AVOIDANCE, DECONTAMINATION

I've lost all the usual stuff, "friends," family, relationships, jobs, my house, savings etc. etc., and it's pretty tough to find out after all of that, none of it was necessary.

If the doctors had listened when I first gave them the clues, it wouldn't have happened.

If I had trusted my own perceptions instead of their bad advice, it wouldn't have happened.

I know this is true, because I finally lost all faith in doctors when I was at absolute rock bottom, and still managed to crawl out of living hell and recover to the extent I did.

It hurts to think of so much of my life that was wasted needlessly.

What I found is that leaving isn't nearly enough - not for me.

"Perception, avoidance and decontamination" is what I keep hammering away at.

The mold on my clothes is more than enough to keep the inflammatory response upregulated. Leaving is better than not, but not nearly good enough.

The trick is to break the response before the immune system is so fired up that it creates its own damage.

That's why I went to the trouble of obtaining a special mobile decontamination device.

This is why I recovered as quickly and as well as I did, in about six months.

You could accomplish the same thing in a minivan by using a bucket to wash your hair, sponge bath, and change into fresh clothes - being sure to bag the contaminated ones to prevent cross contamination.

And this goes way beyond just the mold that I pick up by entering a building.

Anything that has been exposed to mold is the same to me, new or not. Food or furnishings... anything!

This is the kind of lifestyle I still have to maintain to avoid relapsing.
I never got over being mold sick. I just got so good at controlling it that no one can tell anymore.

If someone is made ill by mold, I find it hard to believe that taking the extra step to quickly decontaminate would be anything but helpful for everyone.

Until you've experience getting clear and have an idea of what you are trying to accomplish, it seems crazy though.

-Erik (2005)

*  

My reactivity to mold grew worse no matter where I lived.

It was that this reactivity did not correspond to one bad house or specific location that made it so confusing. I was getting slammed in small doses all over the place.

It wasn't until I trained myself to stop trying to connect it to one major place and focus on barely perceptible hits from all over the place that I could even tell that the subtle burning sensation and not the smell of mustiness was actually an indicator of exposure.

Mustiness is from microbial volatile organic compounds, and generally not very toxic.

This isn't like an allergy with an "on-off" response, where you walk away and suddenly everything is normal again.

Although mold allergy is certainly a problem, mycotoxin illness is a matter of long-term exposure from a wide variety of sources.

It took me months of avoiding subtle sensations before I really knew that I was pushing in a good direction.

What better test could I do than offer to take people to Truckee High School - to the place where the first CFS cluster originated - and have them see for themselves what they feel there?

Of course, learning how to live like a mold avoidance maniac is not easy. But for me, it beats the alternative.

-Erik (2006)
DESPERATION

We all go through the stage where we'd like to avoid doing anything really crazy, like trashing everything we own.

I sure did. I fought this for many years with every conventional concept that doctors and "mold experts" were totally willing to sell me - while they watched me inexorably falling apart. And it didn't help much.

Finally I had nothing left to cling to.

Possessions meant nothing to me. I was gonna die. Nothing left to lose anymore.

So I had one more thing to try, and went all-out on avoidance on this one specific substance.

And, as you see, it worked out a bit better than anyone expected.

I'd rather live in a dumpster than go back to the way I used to feel.

It's ironic that people have to be dumped down to such a desperate stage that they are willing to do anything before they can experience this.

So far, people who have done so only wish they had done it sooner and not tried to cling to possessions that gave every sense of trying to kill them.

I've had silly things like one old book totally permeate my safe zone with badness - and out it has to go.

Testing is worthless and counterproductive. One has to learn to perceive subtle mold clues and act in accordance with them at all times.

This is a strategy for the very desperate who are beyond the threshold of hanging on to their old life.

-Erik (2007)

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If someone had just given me the advice to "beware mold," I would have considered it the most important and precious gift I ever could have received.
But nobody knew, and I had to work it out on my own.

-Erik (2010)

**RADIATION**

This philosophy is what gets me through.

It is by treating this problem exactly as the military trained me to think of radioactivity. "RAD's: Radiation Absorbed Dosage."

Duration of exposure dictates how long you'll last, regardless of whether you can feel it.

I trained myself to feel it at its lowest possible discernible level, and acted as if that sensation were plutonium.

-Erik (2010)

*

I was a nuclear missile launcher specialist, and this stuff acted exactly like radioactive dust was predicted to act.

We were trained that in the post-nuclear warfare world, there wouldn't be enough Geiger counters to go around, so we must use our observations to stay alive.

One tank might be hot and another not.

Depends on whether it traveled through a contamination zone, how long it was there, and how much dust had agglomerated onto the metal.

High density metal objects were the worst for attracting radiation, while organic materials were much less.

The way to spot a bad tank would be the subtle health problems that would emerge.

Low-dose radiation doesn’t cause radiation sickness. Whatever emerges will be whatever infections the soldier already had, unless an especially nasty flu or bacterial infection goes through a squad which all would get.

Then you would only notice that some soldiers would be massively sicker than others, but that would be the giveaway that that has some kind of excessive radiation dose from somewhere.
That is when you start searching their possessions for some contaminated items with a Geiger counter.

I treat ionophore exposure the same as radiation.

I avoid mold as if it were plutonium.

The reason "perceptification" is so important that the amount of RAD's (Radiation Absorbed Dose) varies according to duration of exposure, potential for toxin acquisition, and what kind of static charge dictates agglomeration.

I remember my shock at being informed that if we go through a hot zone from a neutron burst, our metal vehicles might become over tolerance while our organic clothing material might not.

"Then what about our M16's?"

"Sorry, I know you guys will feel naked without your weapon, but if it picks up a dose of RAD's, you must drop it."

That's how I was trained to stay alive.

-Erik (2011)

*

I wasn't just a normal nuclear missile launcher specialist.

It was an "Enhanced Radiation Weapons System," better known as "The Neutron Bomb."

As its inventor, Sam Cohen, said, "The most despised weapon in the history of warfare."

People who know how it works find the concept absolutely despicable and evil...as they should, for it is.

It doesn't just blow you to atoms, like a "respectable" nuclear weapon.

The neutron bomb is absolutely hideous. It simply erases any immune response, leaving you, as Sam says, "The most miserable creature in all of God's creation."

During the Incline epidemic, when people were staggering around just like the “Walking Ghosts” -- or "Dead Man Walking," as we called it -- I thought, "This is just like my training."
This training put me light years ahead of the doctors. They offered me no advice that could possibly compare to the training I already had.

-Erik (2011)

*  

I was in the military, as a nuclear missile launcher specialist, and was trained in biological, chemical and radiological warfare survival protocols.

The Army knows that it is not completely necessary for a soldier to understand what the agent is, to remember its chemical composition, or to know exactly how it does its damage.

The only thing a soldier really needs to know is how to detect, evacuate, avoid and decontaminate in response to these threats.

I noticed that where clusters of CFS had occurred, there was a slight palpable sensation that had a deleterious effect on people.

I conducted an experiment of treating these vague sensations using biowarfare survival protocols, and obtained results beyond anything I dared hope for.

This is not an easy way to go. I consider it to more of a clue than a viable therapy that everyone should start doing.

It's a desperate leap.

For those of us who have been able to pursue this avoidance strategy, a significant number have had very impressive results.

-Erik (2010)
Chapter 2

Hyperreactivity

INFINITESIMAL AMOUNTS

When it comes to describing this nightmare, where do you start?

Let me tell you a story about this tent.

I got it as a backup for my RV, which gets contaminated when it's inside mold zones.

I set the tent up inside a mold zone and it picked up a load of badness. Between it and my contaminated gear, I wound up sleeping outside the tent on the bare ground the first night of this backpacking trip.

I spent the next morning washing all of my stuff in the lake and drying it out before I could get going.

Now you tell me. How do I go into groups and start talking about this kind of insanity?
Basically, you have to see some of this crap before you can believe it.

If I just try to tell someone straight out, they aren't going to believe a word of it.

-Erik (2008)

*

I bought a book at a flea market in Santa Cruz.

One dinky little book, and the thing was like a biological weapon.

When I had examined the book in the open air, I hadn't noticed how bad it was. But as soon as I got it in the car, the disorientation and cognitive issues were overwhelming.

The enclosed space concentrated the effect in a manner that is worth taking notice of, for this is the enhancement that happens when bad objects are brought indoors.

I had to pull off the road and get rid of it. The aftereffect seemed to die down in a couple of hours.

When we can have a single book rock our world, it's impossible to project that an otherwise perfectly swell place didn't have someone bring such objects in.

-Erik (2008)

*

My sister-in-law is working in a doctor's office that has a mold problem in the back room. When I was really amped up, I couldn't sit in her favorite chair in her living room.

It wasn't that her house was that bad. It was just what she was carrying home on her clothes.

But it made no difference to me if mold was growing there or cross-contaminated there.

-Erik (2008)

*

Some of the worst mold slams I've ever had were outdoors, as in the killer mold plume in Incline Village.

-Erik (2006)
FAILURE TO PERCEIVE

Recently I've been taking people who haven't got a clue that they are reactive to mycotoxins into contaminated areas and watching them drop.

It's quite a revelation to them.

-Erik (2004)

*

To learn where the mold is, you have to trust someone who has been pushed to the limit, and has come back to tell the story.

Only people who have become hypersensitized know precisely where it is.

The rest only feel vague "Good Day / Bad Day" fluctuations in their illness.

Those who have not reached that point of discernment use their failure to perceive it as evidence that it isn't there.

-Erik (2010)

PROXIMITY TESTING

By moving into a really bad place, you become aware that the effect really exists.

But consider that if a slammer location can make you really ill, what about all the minor hits that one might take at a far lesser level which might scarcely even be felt?

In Mold Warriors, I tell the story about seeing my captain in the Army drop after getting too close to me after I had a peanut butter sandwich.

It seemed to me that if he was constantly being hit in a minor way, which might possibly happen if I had told people in my unit about his weakness and they all started smearing peanut butter everywhere, how long could he possibly last?

Wouldn't this constant bombardment wear him down over time? Even if he didn't get too close, but people had still increased the ambient level of exposure?

When I started thinking about how my health gradually shifted in places and according to seasons, it made me wonder how much further I might be able to control the problem if I learned to sense subclinical exposures to this substance, which was concentrated in
certain places, and treat lesser exposures as though they were having a long-term effect - in the same theoretical way as peanut anaphylaxis might wear someone down.

I identified a sample of the mold that was most bothersome and took a bit out to the desert. After getting myself as clear as possible, I did proximity testing to see at what distance this tiny amount would still have a discernible effect.

It was astounding. Just like the peanut allergy in my commanding officer. Infinitesimal amounts were still creating sensations which were only discernible by the fact that there was a shift in symptoms.

For example, if I was slightly depressed, it would get slightly worse. If I had difficulty sleeping, the problem would turn into full on insomnia. If I felt slightly anxious, it would turn into a sense of desperation.

What I felt wasn't "mold" per se, like an allergy. It was the shift in symptomology. And because I had taken the mold to a place free of other variables, I concluded that this was the factor responsible.

I also learned that mold acts in a special context which differentiates it from other factors, so you recognize it by the way it moves.

-Erik (2006)

*  

When I took a sample of Stachy out to the desert for proximity testing, I was shocked to find that an extremely small amount could still have a mildly discernible effect at a distance. If it could do that, then the implications are enormous.

This changed everything.

Anything that went through a moldy warehouse, anything at all - even something shiny-brand-new and wrapped in plastic - could have a sufficient amount of this substance to keep me jacked up if I were within six feet of it.

Just driving through town, through a plume, can put enough of this stuff on my possessions to keep me vaguely ill.

The overt slams can be felt by most people, so that's what they pay attention to.

Yet the subtle ones can keep the immune system upregulated even if they are barely felt.

The longer the immune system is upregulated, the more anti-inflammatory cytokines are removed as the immune system tries to resolve the problem.
Can’t smell it. Can’t see it. The reactions are subtle.

Have to go by perceptions. Vague sense of cardio-distress and hypoperfusion. A few others.

Dr. Shoemaker says that by going to the extreme, I was calming things down enough to allow the immune system to reset itself.

Which is funny, because twenty years ago, when I would take time every day to make my way out to a pristine area, I used to call it "breaking the response."

Even if one steps away from an overt mold slam, apparently that's not good enough.

One has to get really, really calmed down to allow the anti-inflammatory cytokines to reassert their control over the cascade of upregulation.

-Erik (2007)

**LOOKING FOR MOLD**

This has not been easy!

There is most often no odor, no sign, and nothing except your own reaction to use as a guide.

Not only that, but the response is often delayed four hours after exposure and can last for days afterwards, which complicates a strategy of avoidance to an incredible degree.

-Erik (2005)

*

Mold acts in myriad bizarre ways that are so difficult to explain that it’s easier to demonstrate.

But the first thing is to not be too eager to rule out mold just because you can't see it, smell it, or find it with conventional tests.

-Erik (2006)

*

I've been in plenty of moldy places which don't have any apparent effect on me.
But on the other hand, I've taken articles that were knowingly exposed to Stachy out to the desert, laid out a tarp on the ground, positioned the parameters of the test, done a few experiments to see how close I can get to the lone bad object in an otherwise pristine environment - and the damn stuff knocks me for a loop at a distance of several feet.

So the trick is to identify where it is - and stay just far away enough to be out of range.

-Erik (2006)

* 

Any building can have Stachy.

Guessing is like judging a book by its cover.

-Erik (2009)

**MOVING**

Moving never did all that much for me. I had moved many times and even though it made a slight difference, it was just enough to let me know the “effect” existed differentially in various places.

I know people who tried just moving and didn't feel much different, but they took their pillows and clothing with them.

This reactivity is nothing like an allergy. It is so difficult to describe that I literally have to haul people in and out of exposures asking, "Do you feel it now?" over and over.

It really saves a lot of time - as in, years of trying!

-Erik (2006)

* 

If it were as easy as just going to the desert, virtually everyone would be in control of their symptoms by now.

It wasn't. Controlling cross contamination was the key.

-Erik (2008)
GETTING STARTED

My experiment consisted of abandoning all my possessions and moving into a new camper. I wash everything that goes into the camper including myself. I sleep on a plastic sheet and use four sleeping bags that I wash every three days each so I can rotate any which become contaminated.

I wanted to take my experiment to the ultimate length I could manage to determine how much effect the mold was truly having on my CFS.

To my astonishment, many of my symptoms disappeared completely and the ones that remain are greatly diminished and are gradually going away, leaving only the reactivity intact.

My experience indicates that moving does you little good if you take contaminated possessions with you. If you go somewhere that has this stuff and then carry it into your bedding, the upregulation during sleep would not give you sufficient time to rejuvenate.

My problem at this point is not the toxicity of the mold but my own response to amounts that are certainly no greater than parts per million, just as we see in an anaphylactic reaction to aflatoxins in peanuts suffered by those who have been sensitized.

The toxin adsorbs onto virtually any material and any attempts to mechanically remove the colony can spread enough spores to make a sensitized person totally unable to endure the area.

-Erik (2000)

NO LIMIT

My sensitivity crept up on me just like everybody else. I just kept getting more and more sensitive to Stachy no matter where I lived or how I tried to avoid it.

-Erik (2001)

* 

It’s hard to believe that there is simply no limit to how strong this reactivity can become.

Most people tend to think that at some point it probably doesn’t get worse.
When you reach the point that no amount of cleaning can remediate a perfectly washable piece of plastic or ceramic, then you find out that the hysterical people weren't kidding about this.

-Erik (2008)

**BEYOND THE DESERT**

If I were to have followed the lead of MCS’ers who live in special communities, their measures would not have worked for me and my chemical sensitivities would not have abated.

Just moving out of mold wasn't remotely sufficient to address my problems. For years I have told people that I am practicing mold avoidance and they instantly dismiss my story because they sprayed bleach on the mold in their shower or moved from one house to another and that should have been sufficient to rule out mold as a trigger.

Not even close!

I'm talking about a level of sensitivity in which I have to test new furniture for a response because many warehouses are moldy.

People who have survived a mold exposure and realize that they are responsive to their possessions rarely stop to think that this may have happened to new clothing, food, furniture or virtually anything else that stored or manufactured in an area that had a similar level of mycotoxin contamination to the house that drove them out.

No expert can accompany you and test or protect you from the inflammatory response from a bombardment of mold hits from the endless number of contaminated items, buildings and spore plumes that you know full well are capable of causing a response.

If an item from the bad house can still hit you, so can anything that came from a similar environment.

Only learning to recognize the subtle symptoms of exposure and initiating an avoidance and decontamination protocol before it turns into a massive immunological response can give you the respite to abate severe symptoms.

You must become your own expert.

-Erik (2005)
Outside the teachers’ lounge at Truckee High School.

Chapter 3

Getting Started

OBLIVION

The peculiarity that virtually all stories of mold illness have in common is that people don’t recognize it until it hits a certain level. It was certainly having an effect, yet it was not really felt or treated as a serious threat.

The precursor state does not to be sufficiently noticeable to arouse people’s suspicions enough to be consistently recognizable, as evidenced by the people who fail to notice and do not connect mold or SBS to their illness until they are extremely ill.

Chemical exposures have the capacity to induce a masking or blocking response in which the chemical is still doing its damage yet the body mysteriously shuts off the response.
This is what we see so often in the stories of people who didn't realize how much trouble they were in until they went somewhere else.

People in the midst of chronic damaging exposure are almost universally unaware of it. The only real exception is the class of people who finally become so ill that they connect the illness to their location even without experiencing the relative shift.

Going to a pristine location unmasks the masking response, and what was felt to be a tolerable exposure is suddenly unveiled as a source of toxicity and a hindrance to recovery.

Everyone I've seen who has returned from getting clear is surprised that sources of exposure they thought to be negligible were far more significant than they had previously perceived.

That's why I say that I pay attention to subtle exposures.

- Erik (2006)

* 

A friend of mine moved into a moldy house six years ago. His allergies have gone wild and just keep getting worse every year. He's at the point now where pine pollen and smoke dictate where he fears to go.

But he likes his house, and it's easy to rationalize his progressive joint problems, achiness, headaches and increased allergy problem as aging.

That's the insidious problem if a house isn't a total slammer.

It'll sneak up slowly and you'll never know how good you might have been unless, by some fluke, you happen to move and experience the miracle of having these symptoms disappear.

- Erik (2006)

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If you examine the stories of people who were made ill by Stachy, you might notice a funny thing.

Almost none of them thought it was mold. People get carried out of places on a stretcher, and they still don't know what happened to them.
You have to take it upon yourself to find this out. Lots of people only stumble over this by moving and wondering why it made a slight difference.

-Erik (2008)

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I can't tell you how many times I have heard people say that mold was the first thing they pointed at, "But my doctor told me that this is impossible, so it must be something else."

Most docs will test you for mold allergy and then tell you that you are allergic to mold - "but mold doesn't cause the symptoms you describe."

I have no respiratory symptoms when hit by toxic mold. That's one of the differences between allergy and toxicity.

Most people are certain that if they were victims of mold, they would surely know it.

They are thinking of an allergy. This is what is misleading them.

Stachy is not particularly allergenic. Thus, people who are thinking allergy are in particular danger of being misled, as they are certain that if there was a serious mold problem, they would be able to detect it.

Until they get that notion completely out of their heads, they are viewing this from such a wrong perspective that meaningful action is not properly conceptualized.

-Erik (2008)

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It seems that the only people who really wish to pursue this are the ones who stumble over the locations effect at some point, and who decide that they are at a desperate stage where they would rather take a flying leap at feeling well than try to cling to their former lives.

-Erik (2009)

**UNCONSCIOUS AVOIDANCE**

In 1998, I talked with a CFS support group leader in Sacramento who described a situation of learning to avoid driving past a specific grove of eucalyptus trees because this would make her ill for several days afterward.
The alternate route added eight miles to her trip, but she considered not getting slammed to be well worth the extra drive. The doctors told her that she was likely allergic to eucalyptus terpenes.

But I asked her, "Do all eucalyptus groves bother you, since they would all have these same terpenes?"

She said, "No, that's the funny part. It is just this one grove. I don't know why the others don't seem to bother me."

Well, I had this same experience back in the early 1980s with a specific grove of eucalyptus up at the top of Lincoln Ave. in San Rafael. Simply going past it would knock me flat for days.

That's how I learned about mold avoidance - the hard way!

-Erik (2008)

RESPONDING TO MOLD CLUES

Years ago there was a woman who described feeling so terrible in her house that her husband forced her to spend as much time outside as possible with her face into whatever wind was available, since this was the only thing that seemed to help.

She described a few other complaints that are good clues to mold reactivity, such as feeling especially bad when storms are approaching.

I've practiced the "face in the wind" therapy often enough to be quite familiar with how it works, so I said that I had an explanation which I could give in 25 words or less.

"You are reactive to toxic mold."

"Mold is in your house and on your clothes."

"The wind reduces your exposure and decreases your response."

There was no response. Once again, my secret remains safe.

-Erik (2005)

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The problem with describing symptoms is that people simply do not see them in themselves.
The only way I have found to consistently bypass the contradictions arising from a lack of conceptual framework is to literally drag people through the "mold tour" until they feel it clearly.

It seems to take a "mold-aware" person to look at them and say, "Wait a minute. I just got a mold hit, and you look like you are responding to it too" before most folks give any serious consideration to the concept.

-Erik (2006)

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I've seen that even people who are looking will not respond to a list of mold clues.

It's weird. It's not the description that is at fault.

People have such a strong preconceived notion that they don't see how this list applies to what they are imagining the situation must be like.

The only exceptions I've seen are when the mold levels are absolutely death-drop horrific. It's not even one in a thousand that people will admit it to themselves at lower levels.

The conceptual framework is so hard to break that I have literally dragged people into dozens of mold exposures and watched them deny each one in turn. Really searching hard for reasons not to believe it.

Over and over I ask, "Do you feel it?" They do, but they always find an excuse not to attach any importance to it.

I point at the dents in the skin. "Oh that? That happens to me all the time. It doesn't mean anything."

And then one day, when they have a sense of how they are feeling suddenly take a downturn as we enter a bad zone together, they just turn and say, "I feel something. Is this what you have been talking about? That's all? But it seems so minor."

And it just suddenly falls into place.

-Erik (2008)

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CFS'ers have no means to mentally connect with the mold phenomenon.
The conceptual framework is one of allergy, and since this isn't acting like an allergy, the mold factor is considered to be effectively ruled out.

I have never found any means of convincing CFS’ers otherwise, without leading them in and out of toxin zones and repeatedly asking, "There it is, how do you feel?"

It usually takes dozens of times before they finally go, "That? That's no big deal, I'm tough. I can handle that."

Mentally perhaps, but the immune system cannot.

-Erik (2010)

NERVE AGENT

Everything I know, the Army taught me in biowarfare training.

We were taught that if you see a foxhole full of soldiers acting strangely and discern the slightest trace of wispy haze, you would be better off facing a machine gun or running through an artillery barrage than you would in that foxhole even with your M17A1 face mask....since nerve agent is absorbed right through the skin.

Slim chance is better than no chance.

One point of emphasis is that nerve agent exposure is distinctly different from blister agents in that NA leaves its victims unable to cognitively bring their attention to the fact that they are massively impaired.

Completely bereft of the mental capability to recognize their situation.

Blister agents will leave no such doubt in anyone's mind.

When I saw how people in moldy buildings were aggressively denying their obvious impairment, I went, "Holy shit! It's the same!!"

They are acting exactly the way the military said that soldiers will predictably respond to nerve agent.

-Erik (2010)
NOT IN THE HOUSE

In the mid-1980s, I was in a large room full of perhaps a hundred people standing in a long line when "the feeling" came over me.

I couldn't stand up any longer.

I knew it was going to look awfully strange to just sit down on the floor and that this would draw attention to myself. But I was swaying and couldn't help it. I was going to pass out. So I just went ahead and sat.

Sure enough, people turned to look, but to my amazement I had started a trend. I could hear others saying, "Good idea" and "I'm about to hit the floor too."

Within a few seconds about a dozen people just joined my little "sit in," all openly talking about how strange it was that they were overcome by dizziness.

"I'm not alone," I thought.

If you wanted to assess the prevalence of susceptible people, all you'd have to do is mount a camera in that place and count the people who are obviously swaying and having difficulty standing up to get a rough guesstimate.

And of course, this is one of the reasons why I discounted the idea that this illness just arises from any particular building and that fixing it will be enough to get you out of this mess.

Get enough slams like that and it doesn't matter if your own house is mold-free. It'll catch up with you anyway.

-Erik (2006)

EVACUATING EARLIER

If there is anything that should be self-evident, it is that the people who decide to find out just how much mold is affecting them and evacuate before they are totally disabled have better outcomes than those who fight it to the end.

If you are in a place that requires major remediation to be livable, the experience of those of us who tried and failed says that it is more likely that you will just continue to become more ill until you have no other option but to crawl out or take your last breath.

It is better to make the jump sooner than later.
Even if the place was successfully remediated, it would take a long time before the ambient toxin level denatures and your recovery would probably be very slow.

If you went all-out on avoidance instead of persisting in a place that needs major work, your chances of improving swiftly and returning to work would be greatly increased.

- Erik (2006)

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I spent every penny I had trying to save my house before I crawled out on my hands and knees.

Don’t put all your eggs in one basket. Try to keep something aside for the possibility that you might have to just be crazy and get out at some point.

- Erik (2006)

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It’s an unfortunate conundrum that many ultra-reactors fail to make the choice to evacuate while still at a point in which they have some health, options and resources left, and put everything they have into remaining in a place that is still over tolerance.

The longer one persists in a place that is beyond their personal tolerance, the fewer choices and resources remain - until destitution and homelessness may be the only recourse to avoid demise.

Strangely enough, the forced plight of "induced homelessness" may be the best chance someone has at making a decent recovery.

- Erik (2008)

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You'll scarcely find a single one of us who has been forced to run for our lives who didn't go through a point where we said, "I'm not there yet."

And when we finally crawled out to our cars because we could not stand one more minute inside our moldy houses, we sat there and cried for this cruel fate that had happened to us.

We wished that we had gone ahead and evacuated while we still had enough health left to think of it as an option, instead of waiting until we had no other choice left.
Because all we got for staying was getting even sicker, and we wound up having to get out anyway.

-Erik (2009)

**HITTING THE WALL**

People are really pushing it when they get to the point of having swollen feet, as the lymphoedema is cutting off circulation, big time.

When their ears turn bright red and the cheeks/temples become flushed, watch out! That is just before hit-the-floor time.

And the closer they get to the edge, the more people deny it, as if wishful thinking can overpower toxic upregulation.

Not hardly.

-Erik (2010)

* I fought "going extreme" as hard as I could.

People often ask me if there is some lesser way to go about this.

If I could have made progress by doing anything less, I sure would have.

In fact, I guess that's what I did for many years, and when I finally ran out of options, had no choice but to amp up the strategy, or go down in flames.

Still, I am not advising people to drop everything and go "extreme" before they have to, (although this sure would have saved me an awfully lot of trouble, had I done so).

Rather, I am just letting people know that I really did try not to be forced to this point, but when I was, despite all my efforts, I already had a "Plan B" in place for such an eventuality.

Most people are counting on whatever they are doing to work, and haven't put much thought into what they will do if it doesn't.

-Erik (2010)

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I was like everyone else. I didn't want to give up either, but I had no choice about making a run for it.

When I finally hit my limit and was headed for the Godforsaken Desert, I couldn't feel my feet, and they weren't responding to my mental commands, so I couldn't operate the gas pedal in the usual manner.

I had to rely on pushing my leg until I hit the right speed and locking in the cruise control.

Same with the passing out. I would drive with the windows open for maximum air, go as far as I could, and then pass out on the seat.

I would wake up drooling all over the place, hours later, drenched with sweat. Start the process all over, go for another half hour or so.

It took me all day to go what should have been a couple hours.

I got out to the GFD and got away from my contaminated RV. Crawled under a bush and then slept on a picnic bench.

Assessing a campground takes a bit of practice, so if I were your place, I'd just aim for something upwind of "civilidevastation" and pick a campsite upwind of everyone else, trusting that it is probably better than where you are.

Anything outdoors has a 90% better chance of being okay than anything indoors.

-Erik (2010)

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At one point I was lying on the floor scarcely able to crawl, thinking that when they come to get me, they will take me to a hospital and pump me full of drugs. There is no way they will ever believe me when I beg them to take me out to the woods or desert. They have no means to understand, and they'll medicate me to death.

I gathered my remaining energy and crawled out to my camper, which was so badly slammed that when I finally did get out to the desert, I couldn't go near it. I went in and out only to get food, but I basically wound up sleeping on the ground upwind of my camper.

If this is the direction one is headed, it is so much better to make your move before you get to the point that all the moves are dictated to you.

-Erik (2010)
I was pretty sure that I was going to die. My eyes turned yellow, I lost my color vision and I could not stand up.

I couldn't stand up in a shower at all. Period.

I would crawl into a shower and lay on the floor, curled up fetal, and just let the water run over me. Sometimes I was too sick to get out of the shower and would stay there for hours.

And yes, I cried a lot, too.

It's kind of funny, really. I was planning to go out to the desert to die like an old coyote. Instead, I got out there and went, "Hey! This feels really good!"

-Erik (2010)

BEYOND MOVING

It's easy to take the illness with you by bringing contaminated possessions along when you move.

Terrible when people have to move three or four times because they didn't know this the first time.

-Erik (2006)

If this were as easy as moving to a mold-free house, I'm pretty sure that it would be a well-established means of dealing with this illness.

I was beyond that point before CFS was created. This is how I wound up being a prototype for a syndrome that needed to be created, for a "mystery illness" that nobody understood.

I have to avoid mold at all times, so the concept of "mold-free housing" tends to create a misleading perspective of the problem.

The slight differential that I felt when I had moved was just enough to tell me that there was a difference...an almost negligible "something" that was better in some places and worse in others.
It wasn't much. It didn't seem like much, but when you are fighting for your life, you take whatever you can get.

All I did was try to maximize this one small effect, and I wound up getting more improvement than I ever dreamed.

-Erik (2009)

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We've all changed locations many times, and this has not done the trick.

I took a wild leap at the concept that these toxins are ubiquitous, and that they can be carried on hair and clothing as easily as the CS gas we used as a biowarfare simulant during military training.

-Erik (2010)

**IT PAID TO GET OUT OF THAT ROOM**

People are making this way, way too complicated by trying to make sense of the whole deal before taking action.

I've found from bitter experience that if you lay out the whole thing in one fell swoop, people are so overwhelmed that they just say, “I'd rather kill myself.” You lose them right there.

I think it’s a huge mistake to demand that all the minutiae and details be completely worked out before taking action.

"It paid to get out of that room.” That's pretty much the basis.

It paid even more to stay out of all such rooms.

Even more so, to decontaminate after momentary exposure to the same sensation that was in that room, whenever and wherever that sensation is encountered.

Sure, it's nice to work out all the details. But completely unnecessary.

-Erik (2008)

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It's getting people to take that first step which is the hard part.

-Erik (2009)

**TOO SICK TO MOVE**

The problem is that people don't feel well enough to move, so they don't find out just how much better they would be if they did.

If someone has the mold clues of illness exacerbation according to exposure, those are the very indicators of how much pain might conceivably be avoided.

The thing that blows us away is that severe sufferers look at their limitations and say, "But I can't do that."

This is a weird kind of situation where you have to crawl out and practice some of this avoidance so you can practice more avoidance.

Getting clear opens up a whole new set of options as energy and function improves.

-Erik (2008)

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One should never look at this as "too severe to move."

The more severe, the greater the need.

One should say it is difficult for severe patients to be moved but should be undertaken.

Not that it is impossible, so one should not try or it is not an option.

To stay alive, it may be the only option.

-Erik (2015)

**GUARANTEES**

I don't think anyone can guarantee results on something that is so dependent upon constant vigilance and self-determination, any more than I could send a hang gliding novice off a mountain and guarantee that they would find thermals, work them effectively... and "sky out."
Occasionally some students acted as if it were the instructor's failure if they didn't get a good flight, but the visible evidence of other pilots who were having a good time served as a demonstration that it wasn't the system which was lacking.

Based on what I've seen, I can almost guarantee that anyone who demands a guarantee is precisely the kind of person who won't make it.

- Erik (2008)

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Camping for a couple of weeks didn't do it for me. It took several months before I was certain it was really starting to make a difference.

I can't say that this strategy will work for everyone or that they are being affected by mold.

What I do know is that many people who searched for mold, filtered for mold, tested for mold, moved several times to rule out mold...finally got to the point where they realized that none of this meant anything.

It only threw them off the track.

- Erik (2008)

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> Is there a usual amount of time a person would spend camping in the desert in order to be well?

It varies, and depends on a lot of factors which seem to be subject to change without warning.

It took me about six months to really be certain that this was no fluke and was truly an intervention that was controllable.

Basically, I'm going at this blind.

I really don't know what avoidance can do, who it can help, how long it should take, or much of anything else.

- Erik (2009)
EMAILS TO A SEVERELY ILL PATIENT (NOW MOSTLY RECOVERED)

I've read your description that you are going to die.

Without knowledge of the extent of your organ damage, I can't venture an opinion, but I remember Dr. Erich Ryll's description of his Infectious Venulitis 1975 cohort was exactly the same as our "Incline Village '85" CFS epidemic: We all believed we were going to die - were looking forward to it, as there was no relief in sight, and woke up every morning amazed that we could suffer so much and not have died during the night.

I know of quite a few people who have abandoned their belongings and moved to a "feel-good" climate/location and have gone from bedridden and feeling absolutely doomed - to recovering somewhere between 80-90%.

Did you see the person who described going to the coast and feeling "50% better"?

Right now, I know a Gulf War veteran who hit his limit of toxicity up here at Lake Tahoe (of all places) and has gone to the coast for some fresh air - because he has learned by long experience that he can make an amazing recovery there.

I built a Mobile Environmental Control Unit for myself which is constructed of mold-resistant metals and plastics. It looks like a normal RV, but is entirely customized.

This has been so miraculous - and I see so many other people complaining of exactly the same clues which led me to do this, that I have no doubts at all that vast numbers of these people could experience a similar level of recovery - if they act before their organ systems are irreparably damaged by chronic inflammation.

I'm sorry to hear about your advanced condition - but I can't help but wonder that even at this stage, if you were to get to a really pristine area for a detox that at the very least, some of your suffering might be decreased. If only more doctors would get on board with this, an affordable detox center might be devised.

It wouldn't take much. Even a tent in the desert has been enough to allow a significant number of people to crawl back from a really low point.

-Erik (2007)

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No. A mold specialist cannot help. This reactivity is just like the peanut allergy I described in Mold Warriors.

Just a few molecules in the wrong place can knock a person flat.
Like a knife that was used to cut a peanut butter sandwich and then used on a sensitive person’s sandwich.

Or that girl in Canada who died after kissing her boyfriend - who had just eaten a PBJ.

I was in a mold zone yesterday and put my shirt aside. This morning I held it up to my face - and sure enough, it has the badness on it. Doesn't feel all that killer at first. Just heart palps and a slight feeling of brain compression.

But that badness adds up, and eats away at you over time.

That's the major difference in what I did. My military training told me to control for cross contamination.

Our CS gas was just like this. If you hung up your jacket without washing it and it was touching some other clothing, that little bit of contamination would slam you later. The biowarfare instructor would tell us, "Some dumb ass is going to think he doesn't have to wash his stuff because it doesn't seem to be all that bad. They just have to learn the hard way."

Sure enough - they would put on something later and start yelling.

I remember a gal who had suffered for years - tried everything in the book - and suddenly she just started to recover.

She had no explanation for it, and said, "Absolutely nothing in my life has changed, except that my husband retired and is hanging around the house all day."

Well, it sounds to me like she instinctively hit on exactly what changed. Her husband was no longer going into a Stachy infested workplace and carrying the spores home to kick her ass.

Yes. That is all it takes.

-Erik (2007)

**FLEEING FROM A BAD PLACE**

I would leave the clothes and take nothing, not even a toothbrush.

I would leave immediately.

That was the wise advice Dr. Herman gave to the Porath family:
The Poraths had family come with new clothing. They changed their clothes on the front lawn to prevent contaminating the car.

My mother met the Porath family and, after hearing their story, told me, "It is just as you said, it is everything you said."

-Erik (2011)

**WHO TO TRUST**

We all wondered what it would be like when the public finally became aware of this problem, and now we get to see it.

Unfortunately for many of these new mold sufferers, rather than speak with survivors, they take their information from those authorities and "experts" who are just barely getting a clue as to what this is like.

They have the same belief we all did at first - that the mold can be easily cleaned up and that life will return to normal.

-Erik (2006)

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Paradigm shifts are very hard to come to grips with.

It's wonderful to have reinforcement from others that you are not exaggerating this in any way.

-Erik (2013)

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Surprisingly, as one can see by all the people I have taught, this is something they have to learn.

Not because they can't feel it, but because they cannot accept it until their perceptions are enabled by confirmation from someone else.

The very first people I showed this to, were of course, the sick teachers during the 1985 outbreak.
But because doctors didn't believe, they disabled their ability to act in accordance with what they could feel, because to do so would have made them "as crazy as Erik."

-Erik (2015)

A “PICTURABLE” EXPLANATION

I think that the initial desert thing is something that needs to be done under guidance. There are many reasons, but I'll go straight to the most important one.

The way humans have trained to conceptualize a problem means that without a "picturable" explanation, they will refuse to respond as an animal might and go with their senses.

If it doesn't make sense, we simply choose not to believe it until further notice.

I've observed people go through the same test of feeling better in good locations, over and over. Because the foibles are so weird, they cannot generate a full picture of this situation.

Without all the pieces in place, the whole puzzle collapses into a confused mess.

The greatest usefulness of an experienced person is to assure them, "Yes, I can feel it too, and no, you aren't imagining things."

-Erik (2008)

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If I tried to tell you how a hang glider really turns, it would take hours to explain all the nuances.

It's a crazy balancing act of so many factors that it's basically indescribable.

After all that describing, it is still extremely unlikely to the point of near impossibility that you could emulate the actions done by an experienced pilot.

We taught people how to launch and land and made sure they could fly more or less straight without stalling. Then we took them to a very high place to give them plenty of altitude to "work it out before you reach the landing area" and told 'em, “Go to it.”

Half an hour of feeling it more than made up for an almost infinite amount of time spent explaining.
It’s a tactile, perceptive thing. Gotta just get out there and do it.

Basically, that's how I see training being done.

-Erik (2008)

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Hang gliding is not a physically demanding sport, but mastering the complexities of the flying environment is absolutely staggering. What you don't know will rip your wings off, and there’s so much crap going on in the sky.

You can't keep your students alive just by telling them how to control a particular situation.

They need to have a working knowledge of numerous factors, and be able to adapt to a fast-changing set of circumstances.

It’s all so overwhelming when someone first starts that you can't just hand it to them. It’s just too much.

You have to first show them what kind of questions they need to be asking.

-Erik (2010)

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This is such a bitch to learn by reading that it's almost ridiculous to even try. Demonstrations do in minutes what months of explaining can't.

-Erik (2015)

**PLAYING THE GAME**

Don't blame me. I didn't make up the rules for this stupid game. I just learned how to play it.

-Erik (2008)

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I remember trying to think of how best to describe this.
What I came up with is that it is like trying to make your way through a maze whose walls are lined with barbed wire, razor blades and shards of broken glass...while blindfolded.

You pick a direction, proceed slowly and cautiously, and when you begin to feel something sharp... just as slowly, back away and try another direction.

The goal is to shred yourself as little as possible as you wind your way through the maze.

You start out with a tent and a sleeping bag and if they hurt you, back away and try different ones.

-Erik (2009)
Hang gliding at Dillon Beach in northern California.

Chapter 4

Mold Sabbatical

A BASELINE FOR EXPOSURE

I only went to the desert to get a baseline for exposure and get clear so that I could perceive mold better.

When I returned to town, I could then locate an area between spore plumes where I could live safely as long as I decontaminated after passing through.

After I located the areas of spore plumage in Incline Village, I didn't even have to leave town. Just not sleep in those areas and avoid them when they are acting up.

No, I don't sleep outside.

It snowed last night. About twenty degrees outside, brrrr, but I've got a roaring fire in my fireplace.
It takes a lot of work to locate places that are tolerable and not being plumed - but that’s infinitely preferable to the alternative.

-Erik (2006)

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If you can get out to some really pristine location and leave your contaminated possessions behind, it is possible to induce a remission that is so amazing and inconceivable that people who experience it are afraid to talk about this effect to their fellow sufferers.

But then, thanks to intensification reaction, if you run into even slight amounts of mold, it feels incredibly more potent. So much so that you wonder how you could have ever stayed alive in the place you previously occupied.

-Erik (2008)

**AS GOOD AS IT GETS**

If someone only does a bit of avoidance and only experiences a small amount of relief, it's hard to convince them to go extreme.

They'll stay right where they are and try to deal with it without upsetting their life too much.

Logistically it is better to work into this slowly... but without the impetus that is provided by a huge shift in wellness, will anyone do it?

Once you experience “as good as it gets,” you feel much more strongly about not wanting to go back.

-Erik (2008)

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You know, it's funny how virtually all hang gliding students say something like, "Well, I don't really know if this sport is for me yet so I'll just start out flying low and slow and not get too high, to see how I feel about it."

We instructors would just chuckle. We didn't bother to correct them, because they soon learned the truth for themselves. Once you get into the air, you realize that near the ground is the last place you want to practice maneuvers.
As the old saying goes, "It isn't the fall that kills you. It's the sudden stop at the bottom."

The higher you are, the more mistakes you can get away with and still recover.

"Low and slow, close to the ground" leaves no margin for error.

I've watched people just try to move without knowing what they were looking for.

It's a crapshoot. Nothing more than taking a chance, which has very good odds of being wrong.

Dr. Rea uses an "Environmental Safe Room" to provide a baseline, so people can unmask their reactivities. This is what mold responders can do for themselves in a pristine environment.

To learn the sensation that is to be avoided, the "Go to the Desert" experiment comes first.

And if a person is so ill that they need to be carried on a stretcher, then that is all the more reason to not make stupid and avoidable errors of moving without a definite purpose.

- Erik (2008)

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I kept hammering away on "Godforsaken desert" type avoidance because all the stuff that other people were doing wouldn't have worked for me.

Pursuance of what they were doing would have left me in years of misery at best, or possibly dead, considering that I don't feel the way I would have felt is a life worth living.

Yes, I understand their situation.

What they don't understand is that by doing something crazy like going to the desert, there exists the possibility that they could recover enough to accomplish things they can't even dream of while in their current condition.

- Erik (2009)

YOU'LL HAVE TO GO ON HOLIDAY

Dr. Sarah Myhill has found that many of her patients have a peculiar reactivity (she calls it a "mould allergy") that is not picked up by conventional allergy testing.
So Dr. Myhill advocates a simple but alternative type of test.

She says, "I'm afraid you will have to go on holiday" as the prime clue is a change in health by shifting locations.

It could go either way though. If you take your vacation in a place which confers a greater level of biotoxin exposure, you'd get worse.

-Erik (2009)

That's what makes the desert experiment so marvelous.

You get clear and then it hits you.

"This crap is all over my stuff. This isn't a matter of just mold colonies, but whether my stuff got slammed."

For so long as people ignore the contamination, they will never get a moment's peace.

-Erik (2015)

THE BUNNY HILL

Hang gliding is a pretty intimidating sport.

When you go out to the flying site and see pilots being whipped around by thermals, battling their way through wind and weather, turbulence and dust devils, doing aerobatics and high speed landing approaches....

Well, it's just too much to take in. Overwhelming, what one has to know, to master all this stuff. Very daunting.

But then you go out to the bunny hill. A small sand dune, and take a few steps into the wind while an instructor holds the flying wires. Just a small taste of getting your feet in the air. It's only a few inches, but what a rush!

It was fun. It was easy. It was safe.

Going out to the GFD for a taste of non-mold is like that.

It's a small hint of what it could be like, if only one could just get clear of this crap.
Whether people want to pursue it or not, at least they know what it feels like.

However much they want to put into it, depends on what they think they’re going to get in return.

-Erik (2010)

*

The Godforsaken Desert experience is such an enlightening first step means of unmasking that to try and conduct avoidance without learning the basics is like trying to learn to fly a modern hang glider by taking an old obsolete standard out to the beach and crashing it a few times, trying to get a taste of what the sport is like.

You'd have to be a fool to not give up, if learning were this hard.

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 5

Intensification Response

GETTING STARTED

Amazing that just when you think you are taking positive steps toward recovery, your sensitivity goes through the roof.

This is one of the peculiarities that leads people to believe they are taking the wrong approach: "Moving out didn't work. I just got worse. This is the wrong thing to do."

It takes somebody who has been through it to explain that what appears to be perfectly logical can be counterproductive, and that becoming more sensitive post-exposure isn't a sign of getting worse.

It's a normal consequence of detoxification.

-Erik (2006)

*
The problem is that people can't help but think of this like an allergy - that if you get away from the mold, you will feel better.

That's not really how it works.

You can go out to the desert or some other mold-free place and feel worse.

This doesn't make sense to people, so they figure the concept is wrong.

The body senses a safe zone and starts dumping toxins. They feel more sensitive to toxins and conclude the concept is crazy.

It takes a kind of leap of faith to do this. Took me about six months of acting totally nuts before I was certain that this was the way to go.

-Erik (2007)

* 

Here's the amazing part. The toxins that kick your butt so badly out in the new environment might very well be the very same toxins which you took with you.

This is the wondrousness of intensification reaction.

It appears that once the body senses it is no longer in a really bad place, it begins to unload toxins at the greatest rate it can.

This makes the slightest re-exposure much more powerful, as it puts you way over tolerance.

It is very typical for someone to get out of a very moldy place, feel this worsening, and be unable to re-enter the very place that didn't seem quite this bad before leaving.

-Erik (2008)

* 

Intensification reaction is an effect where the damping of inflammation allows the body to sense that it is okay to detox, and the fatty tissues start to dump toxins like crazy.

This is the brutal unhappy thing that separates mold illness from allergies.

Everybody thinks that with an allergy, you can hang in there until you can't take it anymore, and the moment you get out, you will feel better.
In mold illness, it's the opposite. You get out and go hyper, which misleads people into thinking that they've done the wrong thing.

Experiencing a worsening of symptoms after getting out is actually a sign that you are starting to get better.

It's very counterintuitive. That's why it's taken so many years for people to figure this out.

- Erik (2009)

THE BRUTAL TRUTH

I'd like to draw particular attention to the way you worded this:

"Reactive to everything, even mold on a lemon."

You are describing entering a very dangerous and precarious phase of intensification. When you leave, anticipate a heightened level of reactivity that will take you by surprise.

Those people who think you can stay in a bad place right up until you can't take it anymore, but will be okay because once you get out, it's all recovery from that point on.

Be warned.

This is not like you think.

You are going to wonder how you ever stayed alive in that place when proximity to mere items brought out will drop you in your tracks.

If you want to make it through, make provisions for total avoidance when this occurs.

Based on what I hear, I would advise that you retain help in packing and storing your belongings and do not return.

Intensification will do things to you that you never thought possible, and the doctors will try to damp it down with prednisone.

Which, as Dr. Shoemaker says, can be devastating if someone is both MSH and ACTH deficient - and is almost a guaranteed prescription for MCS.

The allergic model of illness predicts that getting out will result in guaranteed improvement quickly, but this does not apply here.
You are going to be in for a very nasty surprise in that things get much worse before they get better, just when you least expect it.

- Erik (2006)

*

I've seen people do a trial by going to the desert and then find, to their horror, that they cannot re-enter a place that just seemed "troublesome" when they left.

Holy crap. Now you're stuck between a rock and a hard place. It's "motel city" for sure.

So people who are steadily moving down the path of moldiness aren't going to act until they are forced.

Why would they? If you don't feel a serious need, who would do it?

But if you do feel the need, hell, you are already there.

Once people have no choice, intensification reaction puts them in a terrible position that they didn't plan for.

Really, the only solution I see is for "somebody out there" who recognizes the need to establish Plan B for the people who don't see this coming.

- Erik (2008)

*

I remember once so sleep-deprived and needing a break....just walking out into the desert, scattering rabbits like crazy.

I went out into the sagebrush and curled up on the bare ground.

This sure sucks all right.

- Erik (2008)

*

Getting through that intensification reaction phase was tough.

The mood swings are absolutely wild, so I had to try and remember, "It's the mold that is doing this to me...this is not my personality."

- Erik (2010)
* 

Out in the desert I sat next to the campfire until late at night.

Tried to go back to my camper, and couldn't get near it.

Went back to the fire, laid on the ground and stayed there.

-Erik (2015)

**REACTIVITY VS. SENSITIVITY**

As intensification reaction proceeds, the body senses an opportunity to release sequestered toxins and does so.

This is a critical period in which a re-exposure is more devastating, since the body is pumping out the nasties as fast as it can.

One has to think of reactivity and sensitivity as separate entities.

Reactivity is how bad an exposure disables you, as compared to sensitivity being the ability to perceive things you never noticed before.

As detox proceeds, with any luck the sensitivity will increase, making you better able to sense and avoid future exposures, while the profound reactivity abates.

-Erik (2008)

* 

It may be that one has to go through repeated periods of intensification reaction before the immune system trains itself for a quick enough response to make the notion of mold hit meaningful.

I've led CFS'ers and Lymies in and out of mold zones. They had no idea that they had any reaction to mold until I did this, because their reactions were initially subtle and delayed.

But having done this, they would get back to me and describe that with practice, the ability to perceptify came faster. And the more they conducted even the bare minimums of avoidance, the quicker they became.

-Erik (2008)
What one needs to look at is how profound the reaction is instead of just whether one feels hit or not.

The pain grows less over time, but the ability to perceive can become so acute that you wind up pointing at the most unbelievable things - objects, people, places, air currents, sunshine on an area of carpet.

Everybody around you will say, "But you got out, so it is all behind you. What are you complaining about now?"

Prior to getting really clear and reprogramming the immune system for this heightened sensitivity, a person generally lacks the ability to be so specific - and the illness exacerbation seems to come out of nowhere.

You need to go through intensification reaction before the senses become attuned enough to become this precise.

It's a double-edged sword because the increased sensitivity can either make your life living hell or be your greatest advantage...all according to whether you take action or try to tough it out.

Most people make the mistake of trying to tough it out.

-Erik (2008)

UNMASKING

Your tent may be good. It may be bad. It may be good and then get bad.

If you don't unmask, how will you know? All you know is that you feel like crap, but where is it coming from?

To this day, after I've been in mold plumes, my MECU feels like crap when I get out to the boondocks.

I can't feel it when I'm in the mold zone. I have to get out before I can feel it.

This is where the MECU concept serves to educate on masking by minor re-exposures, and unmasking during detox.

If you get out to the boondocks and you have a strong intensification response, but do not feel slammed by the MECU, then you know that the MECU is not what was driving...
you down and you were pushing it too hard in your other exposures.

As in work, play, wherever it was that you went....even if it didn't feel all that powerful.

-Erik (2008)

* MCS people know about masking.

If you have any tolerance left in your immune system, your body will mask a chemical exposure by making a correction, but the very effort of that correction is depleting your reserves.

When you have no reserves left, you’re in trouble no matter where you go... unless it is to a super-pristine place.

Notice how Dr. Klein had to go through so many hotel rooms before he found one that was tolerable.

Now, the way I see it, these places were probably not all that bad. He was in the throes of intensification reaction and was too amped up to find a safe place. (Been there, done that.)

Still, if a place is bothering you that much, you know that you must surely get out, regardless.

This is the most difficult and troublesome phase of the illness to manage.

Without a MECU or tent in the desert (metaphorically - woods are good), it’s super-difficult to deal with. We’re pretty much stuck with moving on until finding a safe place that is reasonably non-hurtful.

-Erik (2008)

**DISSOCIATION OF TOXINS FROM RECEPTORS**

> I feel bad at the moldy location but feel worse when away from it after a few hours. I am scared. I even feel faint after I eat.

Yes, that is intensification reaction.

It is the detoxification response of dissociation of toxins from the receptors, where they have been locked in place by electron glue.
The fact that you can feel it clearly now suggests that your MSH is very low and your ACTH is almost depleted as well.

Conventional doctors will try to supplement cortisol, which can make things much worse. Like trying to put out a fire with gasoline.

You can survive. You can get through this. We've done it. You can too.

You must find a safe place and not undergo any re-exposure until sufficient toxins have been dumped that the inflammatory response no longer goes out of control (lack of anti-inflammatory cytokine damping response).

This is a perilous stage of intensity. I got my friend through it by taking her to the desert. She had to sit most of the day in the wind outside the RV because she was so reactive. She's doing fine now, though it sure was tough at the time.

-Erik (2006)

* This is described in *Mold Warriors* as dissociation of ionophore toxins from their receptors during intensification reaction.

It isn't a matter of dose so much as being a kind of on/off switch for inflammatory response.

I've always had the perception that once the body feels it is safe to let these toxins go, it does so - and that any re-exposure then is far worse than when the toxins are being sequestered in the fatty tissue.

This even leads people to think that "getting out was wrong, because I feel worse than ever."

But they should also notice that they often can't go back into the very house they came out of.

(If you can, it means you still have a little backup ACTH left.)

I think FIR saunas and Ultra Clear detox are good for this period. Have to watch it though. I remember kind of overdoing it on the sauna and winding up unable to move for hours.

At these times of setback, I would get outside as much as possible. The problem is, in many places, there is still enough badness outside that it isn't safe enough.
That's where I was lucky, because I lived at the very top of Incline. I noticed that at these times, if I went down toward the center of town, I would get far worse. The only thing that helped was to take a shower, change the clothes, and go out to the woods - so I did.

I can't predict how long this intensification lasts. I sure it must be different for everyone, and I've seen people who never get quite clear enough to come out the other side and just stay locked into that same level.

It's the people who are willing to go to the desert or the coast and live in a tent, if necessary, who seem to get through this the quickest.

-Erik (2007)

**RELATIVE SHIFT**

You tell the difference by noting the relative shift in your degree of reactivity between when you had just walked out of a bad place and walked right back in… and when you get clear and walk back into the same place.

If the intensification reaction is noticeably enhanced and your degree of reactivity is higher than you would expect, where did it come from?

From within.

-Erik (2008)

*

Whenever you make your way to a good location, you generally feel better until you come into contact with something or have a re-exposure somewhere.

If that exposure is strangely worse than you'd expect, as in worse than the last time you were there or came into contact with that object, that's a sign of intensification reaction.

It's the relative shift of your response, correlated to the expected effect of known toxin sources, that tells you which it is.

Sounds confusing at first, but after going through it a few times, it starts to make a weird kind of sense.

And then it gets easier with practice.

-Erik (2008)
"Getting clear" is the education.

People who haven’t experimented with controlling "blocking" never understand why their sensitivities wax and wane from an object that has apparently not been re-contaminated.

-Erik (2010)

THE GODFORSAKEN DESERT

Intensification reaction just blindsides people.

All the allergy concepts say you can take it to the limit and getting out means that the worst is over.

This is the opposite and it takes everyone by surprise.

Some people have done the "go to the GFD" experiment and found to their dismay that they could not go home. Couldn't get near the place they were living.

How bizarre, that you were living in a place and now, cannot stand it for a minute.

If I were starting out, I'd get an RV and a tent. I'd find a campsite that is, at the very least, less bad and set up the tent upwind, with the flap of the tent facing the wind. I'd use the RV for basics, but spend every moment outside.

I'd sleep in the tent with the breeze on my face.

Some institution or agency really needs to get involved. This particular scary phase is a butt slammer beyond belief, and people could get through it a hell of a lot better, if they just had a bit of help and guidance...and a refuge to escape to for a while until the worst is over.

-Erik (2010)

With all doctors telling me that feeling worse was a bad sign of impending doom and death, I was pretty well convinced that this increasing problem was the last gasp as I sailed off the edge of the cliff.

Then I went to the desert.
I noticed that as my sensitivity was increasing, my reactivity was going down. I could feel more and more stuff, but it hurt me less and less.

The increased reactivity to things is because you unmasked by getting-clear. The more you get clear, the quicker the detox.

I learned to seek out the pristine conditions that caused me to become hypersensitive afterward, because it seemed to me that this was the body sensing it was okay to let go of the bad stuff.

Seek, seek, seek!

After a couple of months, I went, “Wow! It’s working!”

This was a very good thing, although it sure didn't feel like it at the time.

-Erik (2010)

* 

During unmasking, sensitivities shoot through the roof. It feels like you are getting worse.

This is a terrible time as the body starts dumping toxins like crazy, and the body cannot stand the slightest re-exposure.

It's such a precarious time that many people interpret this as "I must be doing the wrong thing" and try to go back to wherever they were.

That's why unmasking has to be recognized for as being a normal part of detox.

I remember my shock at going out to the desert, feeling better while outside, and discovering that I couldn't get within twenty feet of my RV. (I spent the first few days just sitting by the campfire.)

It's a hell of an effect, and without anyone to give you warning about intensification reaction, really catches you off guard.

The way that I felt so much better after a few days of sitting by the fire, but still had horrible problems getting near my camper, suggested detox.

I finally realized that, albeit painful, I must seek out conditions of "getting clear" in order to experience this strange detox.

For a while it seemed like I was totally messing up, because my sensitivity was increasing.
But with a shock, I realized that my perceptivity was going through the roof, but the profundity of my reaction was slowly decreasing.

This told me I was on the right track and should keep at it.

So I did, until finally, instead of diminishing returns and feeling worse, I realized gains in my ability to withstand exposures to this amazing substance.

It is so much easier to make it through this phase way out in the woods, or GFD. (GodForsakenDesert, the more Godforsaken the better.)

With no re-exposures, the body can go ahead and dump toxins at the maximum rate which feels safe for the immune system.

This is why some of us feel that the only decent way to make it through this part with dignity and aplomb is to get people out to the boondocks. It's just too much to deal with inside towns.

-Erik (2010)
Chapter 6

Your Own Testing

THE BEST INDICATOR

If you want to get out of this, you are going to have to quit looking for tests and rely on the best indicator of exposure you've got.

Yourself.

-Erik (2004)

* If people accustom themselves to reliance on their own perceptions, mold testing becomes entirely unnecessary.

I was scoping out a house and wound up pointing at an area where I could feel the badness.

It was behind a beautifully tiled shower wall, and the tiles were non-replaceable.
The contractor couldn't believe that the owner would direct him to demolish a perfectly good-appearing shower that would take thousands of dollars to replace.

But after much persuasion and having it pointed out that he was being paid to do a job and not to question the owner's judgment, he opened up the wall.

And there it was. No testing done at all.

Humans are far better at sensing things than they give themselves credit for.

-Erik (2008)

*

You can always do what experienced realtors do: Find someone who is a Moldie (mold sensitized) and have them go around with you to suspect places.

If you feel something and they tell you that the place is kicking their butt, it might just be mold.

I've done this for lots of people, but I do have to watch it. Overdoing it can certainly drive you below the power curve.

I remember in 1998 talking to a Feng Shui practitioner who was performing this service for friends who used her to determine if a house was a good investment. She said, "I had to stop because I got so sick that I just couldn't take it anymore."

But she didn't know about decontamination protocols. It could have saved her a lot of trouble. Sure has for me.

I wondered if it would be possible to train people to act as their own detectors, since everyone was firmly convinced that this was unknown and unheard of, and therefore, was a degree of reactivity that only a few people could possibly have - since, "I've never heard of this before."

It was remarkably easy. Mostly it consists taking people into mold zones and telling them, "No, it's not just you, because I can feel it too."

-Erik (2008)

*

I never managed to take control of my illness until I totally gave up on the concept of testing for mold in any conventional way.
I shifted to the paradigm of what it must be like for a "peanut responder," who must avoid infinitesimal amounts of peanut residue.

Testing for mold is about as futile as it would be for a peanut responder to have his house tested for peanuts.

The way I detect "the presence" has been by training myself to recognize subtle symptoms of exposure... and using those symptoms as indicators of exposure.

-Erik (2009)

*

It's just like our radiation training in the military.

The true sign of poisoning is not what the Geiger counter says.

It is a sick soldier.

-Erik (2015)

**EXTREME REACTORS**

People point out any mold they see on bread or cheese and say, "There it is - your mortal enemy. You have to run, right?"

And I say, "Hell, I'll eat that stuff with my peanut butter sandwich."

I don't give a damn about mold that isn't of the toxin-producing type.

My fight with doctors was that only a few specific molds were bothersome to me.

My green binoculars were steeped in Stachy and knocked me flat even after being washed and completely submerged in soapy water.

Conversely, lots of dirt floors and moldy basements don't bother me at all.

None of this "testing" discussion applies to people like me.

We are way beyond being able to use tests as a useful guide to action.

-Erik (2005)

*
Studies and statistics using normal people as controls do not reflect the needs of extreme mold responders, and testing cannot address the changing environmental conditions in a viable real time manner.

Anyone who manifests a response to contaminated articles brought out of a contaminated house is misguided to believe that their problems are over because their new environment was tested.

At best, even "perfect" testing can only establish a baseline for a pristine environment. Those of us who have tested ourselves by temporarily retreating to a pristine environment can attest to the ease in which contaminated articles may be introduced and alter our comfort level beyond an acceptable response.

People at lesser stages of this illness can be identified by those of us who have been pushed to an extreme, yet they will reject the concept until they become too ill to ignore it any longer.

-Erik (2006)

* 

I believe that conventional mold testing is the worst thing you could possibly do. The thing is, you may wind up trusting results that have nothing to do with your level of reactivity.

Beyond a certain threshold of reactivity, your own perception must be your guide...and nothing else.

Once a person realizes they are getting hits from objects, all bets are off when it comes to conventional testing.

It seems like a logical thing to do, because how can finding something not be helpful?

But a person at this level may very well be getting hits from something taken out of "Moldville," no matter whether there is something in the environment to be tested or not.

Generally, a person who is getting hits from objects is only confused when a test shows no logical reason for them to be sick. It's almost like a scientific determination that you really are crazy, and lots of folks take it exactly this way.

Now if you take a single contaminated object out to a pristine place and get clear to induce intensification reaction, it is that level of reactivity which determines what you must do.

If a book or something like that can slam you down and make you miserable, there is no way that these tests are going to give you any useful information.
The ironic thing is that if a person decides to ignore conventional mold testing and goes to a pristine place to get clear, they can easily feel where the badness is when they return, and what they feel is more reliable than any test anyway.

-Erik (2008)

*

Up until the early 1980's, mold could be removed with such ease and was such a non-issue that it was feasible to simply dry it out and paint over, and no harmful consequences were ever seen where this was done.

Then something changed.

In those places, this is a completely new paradigm, which closely approximates my training in biological warfare agents.

The medical profession has yet to come to grips with this situation. If someone’s circumstances give the indication that they are in the grip of this new substance, it would be imprudent to practice too much prudence.

They must act in accordance with their perceptions of the severity of their illness.

-Erik (2015)

**BY THE SEAT OF THE PANTS**

What good would it do to plan a fixed strategy that is based on a certain level of reactivity when that level changes dramatically - even within a single day?

I don't bother to try and use my perceptions to fly by the seat of my pants.

If I've flown up to a good altitude, I have some leeway to relax. But if my threshold has been challenged by a lot of exposures and my built-up tolerance is low, I take fewer chances and increase my level of avoidance accordingly.

The notion of testing (and acting on the basis of a test) implies a fixed value for both the environment and the level of reactivity. Neither situation is realistic.

But the conventional wisdom says testing is a good thing, so it really confuses people when I say that it is really counterproductive.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 7
Perceptifying

FINE-TUNING EXPOSURES

This is going to seem strange, I guess, but becoming hyperreactive was the best thing that could have happened to me.

It gave me the ability to fine-tune my neurotoxic exposures.

Imagine if a peanut responder hadn’t identified the culprit yet, and was being kicked around by peanut oil, peanut butter on people’s breath and packets of peanuts on airplanes, but was just wandering around wondering why he was getting slammed wherever he went.

Now imagine if that person knew to avoid products with peanut oil, could step away when people have been eating peanut butter, and only boarded peanut-free aircraft.
By being able to sense it and step away, the peanut person would actually do better than ever before.

-Erik (2006)

*

Intensification reaction is like passing a trial by fire.

When you come out the other side, you become a lean, mean, mold-detecting machine.

You will feel it on people’s clothing, hidden inside walls, wafting through the air. Instead of aimless feelings that come out of nowhere, you know exactly what you must avoid, right where it is.

People who refuse to heed the signals and fight this sensitivity will call it a curse, but those of us who use this as our indicator of exposure, and learn to play by the new rules, see this as a gift. We have the best indicators one could possibly ask for.

It becomes an almost unconscious second nature, so natural that one acts almost without thinking.

You get used to it, and it doesn’t seem strange at all.

Nature has graciously provided us with the tools to survive and recover. We just have to use them.

-Erik (2010)

*

Some pilots couldn’t work the small thermals and could only gain altitude if they ran into a boomer.

Others could sky-out on days when there were no boomers, just by working their butts off on the little "fifteen feet here" and "twenty foot there" bumps of lift.

The pilots who weren’t sensitive enough to work the small stuff were always in amazement that others could fly high, when they only sank out.

You can have pilots sharing the same sky, same conditions, but the skill level made all the difference and the only way the ones who needed to hone theirs could tell they needed more practice on thermalling was that they weren’t skying out on that same days when others were.
That is what going to the desert is all about. To get as clear as possible to learn to work the small stuff.

-Erik (2010)

*A sensitized person finds and points at these sourcepoints with ease.

Over and over, we show how we can step a few feet away and be out of range.

No one but another sensitized person believes us.

-Erik (2015)

**SUBTLE INDICATORS**

I know a "million" places that are contaminated.

But the problem is that the symptoms that I use for detection of mold are the very ones that are passed off as being "just me" or "from within with no apparent cause."

So the first thing I have to do is get people to do is unlearn their conceptions of what responses are emotionally induced as opposed to being an inflammatory reaction to toxin exposure.

The best way I know to do this is explain the symptoms, and then go into a contaminated place and share the upregulation while comparing severity of response.

And then go through a decontamination protocol and compare the relief.

-Erik (2004)

*My primary irritant was disputed by all doctors even though I could clearly feel that it was mold, so I adopted the expedient of hiring a mycologist to accompany me while I disturbed various mold colonies. When we found one that such disturbance released a cloud of spores and I collapsed on the floor, I said, "That's the one!"

It was Stachybotrys - and that was the first time I heard the name.

I knew that I had felt this "Stachy hit" in many locations and that testing by conventional means was expensive, time-consuming and would not give me a real-time indicator of
exposure, so I took a sample of a Stachy contaminated object to a pristine location and trained myself to recognize the most subtle sensations of exposure that I could perceive.

In this way, I don't require a major slam to recognize that I have been exposed, and I conduct avoidance before my immune system is upregulated to the point of being painfully disabled.

Early recognition and consistent avoidance gave me the break I needed to get on top of the power curve and enjoy a level of recovery I had never been able to achieve prior to making this concerted effort to consistently avoid these specific exposures.

- Erik (2005)

*

I wondered if this was something that only a supersensitive person could do, so I tried demonstrating it to others.

It takes a while, but I've found that mold detection is pretty easy for most people. They always give me an excited phone call when they find their own slammer spore plumes.

- Erik (2005)

*

The hardest thing about this is not learning to perceive exposures.

It is learning to accept that certain subtle sensations are harbingers of disaster - and to bring yourself to act in accordance with the gravity of those indicators by understanding the consequences.

When I take people around to hot spots to demonstrate mold detection, most people can feel them. The difficult part is to unlearn the tendency to minimize the perceptual discomfort they cause.

"But that? That's nothing, I'm tough, I can handle that - if that's as bad as it feels."

How bad you feel isn't the point.

The stories you see of people driven out by mold have this in common.
We didn't realize that the minor sensations that we were trying so hard to ignore were actually harbingers of eventual immunological destruction.

-Erik (2006)

*

I make no effort at all to avoid normal molds.

There was just this one....sensation. It happened in certain places, under certain conditions - so unlike mold that nobody believed it could be mold.

"Surely it must be some chemical," they said. But through all the various chemicals, the various places, the common denominator was this strange emission from mold.

I spent years just avoiding this effect. It kept cropping up from places where mold was the only common denominator.

I knew that not all molds bothered me, so I figured there was something specific that needed looking into.

Finally in 1997, I hired a mycologist to accompany me while I wandered around to various mold colonies. When one floored me, I asked what it was.

That was the first time I heard of "Stachybotrys." The others didn't bother me, so I now say, "Stachybotrys" because my perceptions confirmed that this one was really bad.

But in general, I just stay away from the effect. Even if it were from other molds, so what? If it causes me to feel anything like the way I felt around that Stachy, I'm going to stay away from it.

If I wind up avoiding other things at the same time, I don't really care...just so long as it works.

-Erik (2008)

*

Microbial Volatile Organic Compounds (mVOC’s) are a normal and often harmless byproduct of microbial decomposition.

Trying to use musty smells as an indicator of exposure will have you running away from places that may be harmless. Mycotoxins per se have no odor, only an acrid "pungency."


The trick is to discern the burning sensation associated with trichothecene mycotoxins and use that as a warning sign.

If musty places don't hit me, I make no effort to avoid them.

-Erik (2008)

>*

>To get clear before you feel bad, you are using a preemptive leap of faith. What tells you to do that? Something makes me do that sometimes, and I can't really put my finger on it. A smell, but not really a smell. An uneasiness without reason.

Yes! That's it. An almost indefinable intimation of impending doom.

A vague sense of oppression and unfounded dread.

Like an invisible life-draining "nothingness" that is only discernible by feeling your energy being stolen from your body, and by little else.

It almost seems like the most problematic irritant of all carries the fewest indicators of its presence.

Like a cyclosporin, which doesn't really do much of anything except completely shut down normal immune response.

So many times, I've wanted to take researchers to a bad place and tell them, "Not there. Not where you think it is. It's over here."

A quarter century of watching Indoor Air Quality experts test the crap out of places, and utterly fail to correlate "the presence" with people's horrible illness, tells me reliance on their conventional tests is the worst mistake a Moldie can make.

-Erik (2009)

>*

I didn't learn how to do this by accident. I took a sample of mold to the desert and taught myself how to recognize it.

I took a very small sample of mold and laid it on a sheet of Visqueen, right out there in the sagebrush. I tried sleeping next to it in varying proximity, starting at a ten feet away. When I got to six feet, I realized that if something so slight could do this to me, there was no way I could ever go home.

-Erik (2011)
“THE EFFECT”

It's so simple that it sounds absurd.

Go to a place like Truckee H.S.: Ground Zero for CFS.

Memorize the sensations.

Avoid those sensations as if they were plutonium.

There are innumerable details, but that is the crux of the matter.

-Erik (2006)

*

The problem with mold hits is they don't have a distinctive characteristic that sets them apart from a generalized inflammatory response.

You have to examine the situation in context to know whether it's a mold hit or something else.

-Erik (2006)

*

I never bother wasting time looking for visible mold. I've been driven out of perfectly good houses by a mold plume that was upwind of the one I was in.

I go by how I feel.

-Erik (2015)

*

Sometimes the entrance to Truckee HS would give me nothing but palps. Other times only a chemical burning sensation.

Or others, nothing at all.

-Erik (2015)
DELAYED RESPONSE

Amazingly enough, when I first started mold avoidance, there was no discernible reaction to mold for several hours. I had to remember where I had been four hours before, and make the connection.

But the more I recovered, the more sensitive I became.

People think that the sensitivity is the illness. It's not. It's the body trying to warn you.

But people aren't listening to the warnings and are trying overpower it using "The Power of the Mind."

Big mistake! Should have listened to what the body was trying to say.

-Erik (2008)

* 

It was the delayed response to what I hadn't thought to be a bad place that shook me into trying to figure out subtle precursors that take a special effort to find. They were more important than I had thought.

After paying attention to these, my reactivity dramatically abated, and my ability to perceive became much greater and much faster.

-Erik (2008)

* 

> When I drive or walk by a planter bed, the smell is so strong it makes me gag at times. Does this mean I am going through a mold plume?

It may very well be... but one cannot detect the bad stuff by smell, which may or may not accompany a toxin source.

The real clue is the way you feel afterwards, up to around four hours later.

It's tricky. If it weren't, everyone would already know.

-Erik (2009)

* 

The toxins, bad as they are going in, feel even worse later when they're coming out.
You diagnose the bad places by where you were, and how you feel later.

- Erik (2010)

*

I had to learn my limits by seeing how far I could go and remembering the degree of aftermath.

- Erik (2015)

**TECHNIQUES**

"Sensation of extreme lethargy that inexplicably abates upon rising."

That's a "mold clue" biggie. People are astonished that resting makes them even more tired, and that getting up and moving around refreshes them far more than they expected from getting the blood moving.

That's a characteristic of horizontal accumulations of spores which helps to differentiate toxic mold from other household toxins.

That sensation which steals your motivation is so consistent that it can be used as an indication of immune activation. The very time when you feel least able to crawl out and get away from this stuff is the very time when it is most necessary.

The more you notice that strange sensation that you are better once up, and the more that the butt-kicking lethargic Malaise Monster keeps trying to push you back into a horizontal attitude, the more you need to fight, fight, fight.... to stay upright and drag yourself outside for some fresh air.

Don't give in to the Monster. If you lie down, the Monster wins.

- Erik (2008)

*

> My lungs freeze up when I'm around mold.

Yeah, seems to be a consistent description. And the educated response is always to try harder - breathing exercises - deep breaths.
Ironic, isn't it? The body is trying to send a message to a mind which is too smart to be fooled into accepting it.

-Erik (2008)

* 

Not being able to breathe. It doesn't say much, does it?

Maybe a few more clues, but only after long-term exposure.

Is that it? Is that the difference between health and sickness...the only clues that people are going to get?

Yes, that's it. That is all.

It's like the Army trained us for nerve gas exposure. "If you jump into a foxhole and the soldiers are slurring their words, pinpoint pupils, slight reddening of the skin...."

That's it. That's all the chance you've got. Ignore those little clues, and you are just as dead as they soon will be.

The very agent itself deprives soldiers of the mental ability to perceive what is happening to them. If someone else doesn't see it first, and help them get on their gas masks, and hit them with Nerve Agent Atropine Auto Injectors...their chance to get out is gone.

I know. It's frustrating, like there should be more warning.

But there isn't.

You can see by all the stories of people who failed to sense their plight that it just doesn't work that way.

-Erik (2008)

* 

Here's a little trick. Think of some math situations, such as trying to remember a new phone number, counting backwards from 100 in increments of 7, or maybe some simple multiplication.

When you have identified a few which are just barely too difficult to accomplish, go outside, stand upwind of your house, breathe deeply for several minutes, and then try to work the same problems. See what happens.
It's amazing, and a good test of the environment.

-Erik (2011)

*

I prefer a stethoscope to monitoring my pulse, as often my heart rate did not change. It just pounded harder.

I gave away my stethoscope after practice made me familiar enough with the sensation that I no longer needed it.

Dr. Cheney and I discussed this back in 1986.

He said there was a strange internalized blood pressure abnormality, like a "false high blood pressure" that isn't registered on a sphygmomanometer because the pressure doesn't make it to the limbs.

This is borne out by the enlarged left ventricle. The heart is working harder but the blood isn't going anywhere.

-Erik (2015)

CHOOSING A RESIDENCE

I can't tell if a house is good or bad after I've been hit.

So I get clear and then go directly to the place and assess my response by trying to sleep there.

A lot of places that seem okay turn out to be bad for me if the wind changes directions, so I have to be there under various weather conditions and wind directions.

-Erik (2005)

*

The best thing is to get clear in as pristine a place as possible, and then go directly to the location you wish to "perceptify."

Before you go inside, face the wind and breathe for at least a minute.
Imagine a scale of how long you expect to live. As in, "On a scale of one to ten, how long do I think I am going to last?"

I call this "The Suicide Scale," because that is honestly how people feel when they are at this point of reactivity.

Put a number on where you fall on the SS. Doesn’t matter where. If you are a "two" and think maybe another week of this crap and you are ready to pull the plug, then call it as you see it. The scale is arbitrary, so the only thing that matters is whether you are honest with yourself.

Now go inside and lay flat on the floor, with your nose pretty much down to the ground. If there is an accumulation of spores, this is where the highest intensity of toxin potential is likeliest.

If your heart starts pounding, get out! The place is over tolerance.

If not, sit up and ask yourself if the number on the scale has decreased. As in, you still want to pull the plug but now...it's tomorrow or perhaps sooner.

A sudden downward shift in the depression response is the giveaway. Not acceptable!

But if you feel nothing, does that mean the place is safe? Nope. Only after you've been in there when the weather changes and the wind kicks up from different directions will you know that the place stays good during times of release.

Having to wait for the weather to find out makes it tough.

But if you have a car that feels okay, you can scope out places. When a storm comes, go to the place and find somewhere to park that is as close as possible.

Try to sleep in your car. Do the scale again. If it goes down - bad area. If not, get out of car and lie flat on the ground and try again.

When you have finally found a place that is utterly free of any shift on the "Suicide Scale," congratulations!

You found what you are looking for, by checking to determine what doesn’t happen.

- Erik (2008)

* 

Yes, it's worthwhile to move around and compare how you feel.
Sometimes people blunder into really bad places, and yet this gives them the information they need.

"Here it is, I can feel it. This is what I need to stay away from."

-Erik (2008)

*

The toxins that get me have no odor at all.

I can smell associated smuts and mold odors, but that has nothing to do with perceiving the most important mycotoxins.

The only way I have found to determine if a house is okay is to sleep there.

I might know instantly if a place is bad, but I never know for sure if a place is good until I do.

-Erik (2008)

*

Lay a towel or blanket on the floor. Lay down flat for a while.

If it's a mold zone, you'll soon find out.

If it's bad, a minute will tell you. If you feel anything at all, give it a half hour. After that long, if you feel nothing, it's probably okay.

Everyone I've had do this so far has been able to get a sense of exposure if they lay down flat and breathe air straight off the floor. That's where the stuff settles.

If you don't feel any effects at all, I'd guess it's probably OK.

If I can't feel anything from a floor, I start considering that perhaps the exposure is from some other location.

-Erik (2010)

EVALUATING A BOOK

>Did you and Lisa check out my book?
Yup. We both sniffed it out.

We had it on the picnic table at the next campsite over - walking over and putting our noses to it. Must have looked pretty funny if anyone was looking.

I sniffed out the packing envelope, to try to rule out bad post offices.

I didn't feel anything other than on the book and plastic bag. And the plastic bag died down pretty quickly, once it was open and out in the sun.

I felt mild hits off the book. They were just a bit stronger than the hits I was getting when I received my copies of *Mold Warriors*.

I told Dr. Shoemaker that it was ironic his book was arriving "pre-molded," and he said he didn't have any control over that aspect of publication.

Still, that little "extra" suggests that your copy was in a bad place at some point, in addition to coming pre-molded.

But it sure wasn't the worst book I've encountered.

-Erik (2008)

**VISITING A STORE**

>Today I noticed some areas of a store bothered me, and others didn't.

If you go back outside, get some fresh air for at least a minute, and go directly back to that spot without dawdling in "semi-bad" areas, you might even be able to pick out specific contaminated objects...or point right at where the badness is coming from.

-Erik (2008)

**ANIMAL RESPONSES**

My cat, the very same one the doctors told me to get rid of seven years ago as the "cause" of my reactivities, has gone everywhere with me throughout this entire experience.
She is quite the Mold Kitty Warrior.

When we get caught in a plume, she jumps up on me, looking me squarely in the eye, and YOWLS as if to say, "You idiot. What are we doing here?"

This happened so many times that I am convinced that this long "meeeooooooOOOOOWWWWWWWW!!!!" is kittyspeak for, "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Of course, people's first reaction is to say, "Oh, the cat is just responding to your emotional state."

It does no good to point out that I could be asleep in the middle of the night and be awakened by a cat on my chest, screaming at me - and only then become cognitive that I was being moldslammed.

She's a great little fuzzy mold avoidance motivator. I hate to see my furry pal in pain, so we do what needs to be done.

-Erik (2006)

*  

Dang it.

A good friend has a house that is going bad.

I can feel it in the shower. You know, the usual tile glued directly to the sheetrock scenario.

I can only tolerate the place for a short time now, and it's getting worse.

Her house is near a training hill where I am preparing for my annual mountain climbing expedition to celebrate my recovery.

(Mt. Whitney five times and the John Muir Trail so far.)

I stop by to pick up her dog, who accompanies me while I hike.

The poor dog is wheezing and choking as she lies on the carpet.

My friend knows my whole story and is one of the people I mooched a couch from when I was driven out of my house during the Lillehammer Olympics.

But my friend is in total denial. She says, "It can't be mold."
I say, "It's darn funny that the dog is just fine while we are out hiking, and doesn't do that wheezing and gasping for breath while we are outside and when the dog is running thirty miles an hour through the sagebrush."

But what else can I say?

My friend knows the reality just as much as I do. She saw it almost kill me.

It's so hard to act on a sneaking suspicion and on the "little clues."

This is the kind of problem where you have to hit the wall and have no other choice before you are prepared to make the hard decisions this situation puts you in.

I tell you what though.

That is one happy dog when I come by to pick her up for our little walk.

-Erik (2005)
Chapter 8

Depression Response

DEPRESSION AND GRIEF

My own experience is that depression and grief are only connected inasmuch as they can coexist and layer onto each other and feel similar enough to appear to be the same phenomenon.

I have grieved deeply for my lost life and the profound expressions of my grief correspond to the profound nature of this illness.

Depression never correlated to any emotional stimulus.

I could have bouts of depression that were layered onto my grief and make it seem like my emotional state had driven me into a supremely suicidal state, but it struck me as really odd that I could have sudden-onset depression when nothing in my life had changed that should have induced an emotional change.
At least it struck me as odd until I found that my depression had a perfect correlation to cytokine storm from exposure to my MCS irritants.

I discovered that my primary chemical trigger was Stachybotrys mycotoxins.

If I am exposed to Stachy, I still suffer from overwhelming depression that I cannot mentally control even though I know it is just a symptom of chemical sensitivity.

I can eliminate the depression response through avoidance and decontamination. And I can do it quickly!

Having had the amazing experience of finding my primary "trigger" and being able to induce and control depression at will as a completely separate process from emotional responses convinces me that the article, “A Mind Under Siege,” in New Scientist is right.

http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg17022954.600-a-mind-under-siege.html

Grief is an emotion. Depression is a physiological process.

They might feel the same, but they're not.

-Erik (2001)

THE SIXTH SENSE

When I found that relying on mold hits was insufficient guidance for a meaningful avoidance protocol, I changed to “the depression response” as an indicator of low level toxic exposures.

By correlating signs of capillary hypoperfusion along with the relative shift of an emotional response which had no associated mental stimulus, I was able to differentiate that portion of an "emotional state" that did not correspond to dysfunctional attitudes and isolate this characteristic as a useful indicator of neurotoxin exposure.

It really confuses people when I describe depression as the “sixth sense” and the most effective guide to detection of an inflammatory condition that nature could provide, since the customary model of depression is of an undisciplined and counterproductive mental state that serves no purpose.

My response to a doctor who offered me antidepressants: "What? Blunt my perceptions and deprive myself of my most effective means of detecting these toxins? I RELY on the depression response."

-Erik (2002)
I believe that depression is not an illness. It is a warning.

It is the sixth sense - a perceptual interface with immune response.

Depression is to toxic exposures as pain is to a hot stove.

Depression is just the signal that tells the brain about the inflammatory response. It is not an illness in and of itself.

It is a desirable response designed by nature to convey a sense of immunological dysregulation.

It was by acting in accordance with this concept that I proposed the strategy that allowed me to identify my primary neurological irritants and devise an avoidance protocol which took me out of Dr. Peterson’s Ampligen program and back to mountain climbing.

All these years, psychologizers have told me that depression was the source of my illness when it was really means to a solution.

-Erik (2005)

**ANY DUMB ANIMAL**

Avoidance is something that should come naturally to any animal in the kingdom. It should be the normal organic response to such a sensation.

One would expect that any "dumb" animal would wish to evacuate areas of discomfort and would appropriately act upon their impulse.

It is only humans that would even attempt to overpower their discomfort by using mind over matter.

-Erik (2008)

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When I found that my "emotional" responses corresponded to specific locations, I decided that the psychologizers had it all wrong, and that this so-called depression was nature’s own way of inducing an animal to alter its circumstances.

If an uneasy mental state is a consistent response to a location, any "dumb" animal would eventually decide to be elsewhere.
Humans have decided they are much too intelligent to be fooled by these sensations and ignore them.

I was in a sick building and watched a woman come into the office and almost collapse, panicky and breathless, wondering what was happening.

The people in the office went into counseling mode and started seeking out and inventing mental explanations for her discomfort:

"Anxiety from an unfamiliar environment."

"Hyperventilation as a response to altitude, since you just came up to the mountains from a lower level."

"A combination of unknown factors and accumulated stress."

"Fluky panic attack."

And the advice was to sit with her head down and breathe.

I walked over and said, "Ridiculous! This is a sick building, you are a mold responder, and you just got a good whiff of the spore plume down at the entrance."

I described where the plume was, and how I rely on my perceptions to detect such places and learned to hold my breath when passing through that area.

I brought the woman outside to the fresh air, instructing her about how to hold her breath through the "bad zone," and she quickly recovered.

Amazed, she put the concept to the test and learned that she can safely pass in and out of the building as long as she holds her breath while in the plumed zone.

Once her immune system was upregulated, the breathing exercise that others had counseled her to do in that bad building was counterproductive and only made her more anxious and scared.

Had she responded as an animal might, sensing the association between the discomfort and the place, she might have been guided to hold her breath and get the heck out of there as quickly as possible.

-Erik (2009)
ANTIDEPRESSANTS

With a brain already scrambled by mold toxins and viral infection, I figured that it would be best to stay away from any kind of mood altering toxin (antidepressants). I have never taken a single antidepressant, although there were times when I sorely felt the need for a lot of help in this regard.

I take that ominous feeling as a portent of doom, unless I get myself to a slightly better place. This is where it paid off to live up near the top of Incline Village, as I could go into the woods fairly quickly.

-Erik (2008)

PANIC

> If I go in damp moldy places, I almost get panicky in my efforts to get away.

Your body is sending you the correct message in that panic response, but most people view that as an emotional response which they should overpower and suppress through "strength of will."

Bad idea.

I rely on this emotional response as a guide to action: evasion of neurotoxic exposure.

-Erik (2006)

STRESS

People "know" that stress caused their onset in the same way they "knew" that stress caused ulcers. They felt the stress first so they think that's the predisposing factor.

If you have bacteria boring a hole in your guts, it's just conceivable that you might have an inflammatory response.
I noticed that my depression was the first indicator of a toxic exposure and use it as a guide for avoidance. If I wait until I feel like shit, it's way too late and I'll suffer for hours.

By consistently doing this I gradually started feeling better and better.

-Erik (2001)
A DEPRESSING FRIEND

It does help to know that the "depression response" is just that. Not a reflection of reality, but just an immunological reaction.

"It's not you."

In fact, over time, you begin to view this sudden shift in depression almost like a friend, since it has come to warn you of something really important - something you really need to know.

Yes, your depressing "friend" gave you bad news, but it is important to know the truth.

-Erik (2008)

CIVILIZED SOCIETIES

People go, "Oh my God, so this is what it feels like for a normal human."

A doctor friend did some missionary work in South America and was amazed by the happiness in the most utterly impoverished and desperate people she had ever seen.

"How can they be so happy when they have nothing, yet with all the comforts of civilization, I am so depressed? Don't they know they should be miserable?"

And strangely enough, doing this hard missionary work, she had never been happier and looks back upon this time with the fondest memories.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 9

Cross Contamination

WHEREVER IT GOES

What happens to Stachy-slammed possessions that come out of a bad zone?

Does it all wind up in a dumpster and cease to be a problem?

No. Some of it goes somewhere else.

And wherever it goes, there you will find the effect.

-Erik (2008)

*

I was grocery shopping in Reno and suddenly felt slammed. The guy in front of me in the cashier’s line was the source.

He looked to be in his mid to late thirties, but was moving like a cripple. He really looked beat to heck.
I know from years of experience that just standing next to someone who is so badly toasted is enough that it calls for a full on decontamination, so that I don't have a miserable night.

So when I got back to my custom-built, mold-resistant RV, I tossed my clothes out the door to go in an exterior compartment for cleaning and took a shower, making sure to wash my hair really well.

It's like a miracle. Works every time without fail.

-Erik (2011)

*

Years ago I saw that people put an artificial constraint on whether mold was a problem.

If moving out of your known moldy house didn't fix it, that was the cut-off for thinking it must be something else.

But wait a minute. If you are responding to items that came out of your bad house, why wouldn't you respond to objects that came from other moldy houses?

Or warehouses, or manufacturers, or entire zones of high contamination?

Considering how many bad places there are, what are the odds that anything "new" or "different" has never been in one?

-Erik (2011)

*

There are no guarantees that new stuff wasn't from a moldy place.

The risk exists no matter what.

-Erik (2015)

**MILITARY TRAINING**

When I realized the nature of my response to mycotoxins and recognized that it was comparable to battlefield nerve agent attacks, I responded by using the CBR warfare training I received as a nuclear missile launcher specialist.
It was responding to my training in nerve agents that made the difference between being overpowered by exposure and taking control of my symptoms.

-Erik (2005)

*

Moving only gave me enough of an indication of a shift in symptoms to let me know that there was an "effect" which might be exploited.

The complications and logistics of cross contamination are absolutely formidable.

I just applied my military training in biowarfare and built myself a "Mobile Mold Decontamination Module."

Until I took extremely proactive measures of avoidance, I was unable to take significant control over mycotoxin exposure.

This isn't so much a "therapy" as an act of total desperation.

-Erik (2006)

*

I can't keep a mattress pristine.

I guess that my military biowarfare training really gave me a different picture. Soldiers were warned not to avoid washing fatigues simply because they didn't feel like the CS gas had been strong enough to worry about.

We were especially warned not to hang contaminated jackets in our locker where they could touch other garments.

Field jackets were expensive to wash and starch, so there was always someone who thought, "This isn't so bad" and would hang it in their locker.

The inflammation would slowly sneak up on them. Suddenly they would start screaming and run for the barracks to take a shower.

And once they were jacked up, anything that the contaminated article had touched would slam them as well. So they had to wash their clothing anyway - and everything it had touched.

I know that most people don't have to think of cross contamination in these terms, but I do.
My experience is that mattresses are so difficult to avoid contaminating that I gave up trying. Just gets real expensive as you throw them away.

-Erik (2008)

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About the only real trick I've got is that the military drilled it into me to be extremely determined about controlling for contamination.

So although I totally despised this training when I was receiving it, and desperately never wanted to be stuck playing the stupid war game lifestyle again, the constant drilling made it almost second nature.

-Erik (2010)

**FINDING THE PROBLEM**

One CFS sufferer tried to conduct avoidance years ago and stripped a van down to bare metal - taking it out to the desert where he felt better. Yet something went wrong and he just stayed ill.

He couldn't understand why this didn't work and reported being forced to sleep in the cab of his van.

It should be obvious that if "whatever" was in his stripped out van was not in the cab, his experiment was almost successful.

But he wasn't controlling for "whatever" and it came into his presence, but only on his possessions. So if his stuff was hit with "whatever," what could it be?

You know darn well that if something doesn't bother you, it is not inherently bad and must have picked up something bad along the way.

So how do you find out what "whatever" is? You keep track of it from when it wasn't bad and test the place and time where it did.

If you repeat this test often enough and successfully reproduce cross-contamination with "whatever," then you know what "whatever" is, and where it is.
Yes, I know it sounds a bit complicated, but it's actually just a simple process that becomes easy with practice - almost to the point of being second nature after a few years.

-Erik (2008)

A STUPID LITTLE THING

Can a place be cross contaminated easily? Hah! You bet.

I remember one guy who tried to denature some books and papers by putting them in a warm oven.

It caused such a release that he had to bail out of his house for several days.

-Erik (2007)

*  

If this were easy, people would have figured it out long ago.

Let me give you an example.

I'm working in a pretty bad building.

I have to decontaminate after passing through a spore plume right down at the front door.

I have to hold my breath when I pass through it.

Well, day before yesterday, I thought, "It's not so bad today" and just put my contaminated clothing up in the overhead of my RV.

Dang it. It wasn't a big mistake, but I had a less than perfect night's sleep.

So yesterday, I went through, stopped and "perceptified" my clothing.

Yep. It's just a bit more than I care to deal with, so I schlepped them up into the exterior compartment.

Oh, yes. Much better. Slept great last night.

See? Such a stupid little thing. Just some contaminated clothing....and things like this can come at you from anywhere.
If anyone in the house has been through a plume, freshly washed clothing is instantly contaminated.

We have to develop a completely different concept from "clean" and "dirty.

This is different. One slam and it's on anything!

And if anything which has been slammed comes into your presence, the safe zone isn't safe anymore.

-Erik (2008)

*

Ever since my mold slam, I haven't had anything that failed to pick up a toxin load inside moldy places.

Even me. That's why I have to take so many showers.

-Erik (2009)

PREEMPTIVITY

Just a couple of really bad pieces of firewood I snagged for campfires left a bad zone where I stacked them at my campsite on my trip to Mt. Whitney.

Glad I was careful and boxed up the wood in cardboard boxes sealed with duct tape and set on the roof of my camper for the trip down.

It would have been terrible if my trip had been ruined by contaminating my camper.

But I did it right, and the only harm was that there was a zone next to my campfire that I had to avoid.

Needless to say, I burned up the bad wood straight away. Takes a couple of days, but the zone goes away after the moldy wood is gone and then it's all back to normal.

-Erik (2005)

*

More effort at heading off contamination translates into untold amounts of time that isn't spend trying to clean up after the fact.
That really saved me when my air conditioner went bad. I was up there unbolting the thing right away.

And it still darn near drove me out.

Almost, but not quite, because I was right on it.

-Erik (2009)

* 
I found that all my efforts at decontamination were so overwhelming and less than productive that I massively switched my focus to establishing a safe zone and doing everything I could to prevent the badness from entering it instead.

More bang for the buck.

-Erik (2009)

**SPORES VS. VOC’S**

It’s absolutely awesome to hear someone else describe the ability of hair to maintain and transport the mold. I found that wool garments are no different.

I noticed that some contaminated places gave me a huge hit but that I could walk away and recover without decontamination. Other places might hit me less, but I would carry the reaction with me.

This led me to believe that the neurotoxic reaction was to aerosolized mycotoxins and not necessarily inhalation of spores.

I tested this by placing a contaminated article in HEPA filters and taking it to my clean place. I put it under six layers of blankets and slept on it. I got the usual reaction and removed the article but went back to sleep on the same blankets. The reaction was gone.

This convinced me that that spores had not penetrated the filter or blankets and that the toxic gas was truly my primary irritant.

This was confirmed by Dr. Marinkovich, who told me that a housing project in Sweden had recently been identified with sick inhabitants but no spores could be found. Only when the walls were opened up were the colonies found, but they were so tightly sealed in the walls that only the toxic gas could escape.
Many places that give me mold hits are strictly VOC hits and not spores. When I leave these areas I do not have to bother with decontamination.

-Erik (2002)

**ADSORPTION**

My experience tells me that anything that was only temporarily contaminated is easily cleaned or dies down without any cleaning whatsoever within three days. But stuff that has been exposed for a long time not only doesn't clean up by any method I've tried, it stays bad for years.

The problem is that people have a mental image of spores that can be semi-easily washed off, when they should really be thinking adsorbed toxins. The flawed conceptual basis misleads people into predicting the type of results that would be expected if spore removal solved the problem.

People are confused when their expectation isn't matched by the results. They should take this as a clue that their concept needs a little tweaking.

Toxin adsorption from decomposing spores is so variable, depending upon a vast myriad of factors, that no projection of success with long-exposure materials by washing can yield predictable results.

-Erik (2008)

*

These low molecular weight ionophore toxins have a chemical bond to smooth surfaces. They are very durable and cannot be removed by mechanical means.

-Erik (2015)

*

The only molds that bother me appear to have a sticky quality to them.

The bad stuff feels to me like it wants to glom onto things more than it wants to waft and travel.

On one hand this is bad because it readily contaminates objects, but is good because having stuck itself down, it doesn't generally go far.
I avoid or limit my time in hot zones and prevent contaminated objects from entering my safe area, and I can live in fairly close proximity to a bad colony, thanks to this peculiar stickiness it has.

-Erik (2015)

SCATTERED OBJECTS

It should be immediately apparent to anyone who suffers from exposure to so much as a single moldy item taken from their old mold castle that their hair, clothing, objects, purchases or whatever has passed through moldy buildings will be similarly problematic.

No matter how much you remediate your safe zone, if you have the level of reactivity that requires a safe zone, you will soon be adopting decontamination protocols to avoid cross contamination - or you will suffer.

-Erik (2006)

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I know a guy in France who was being driven wacko by a bedroom set that had been in his family for generations. It wasn't the house, nor his room, just the furniture. His family is ready to disown him because he wants to get rid of "precious family heirlooms."

This may be what is happening to you. If the place was really bad, you'd probably feel rotten in more places.

The way you describe “whiffs” suggests that you probably moved to a lower concentration of badness...and your sensitivities shot through the roof.

-Erik (2008)

*

Can just one object be contaminated?

Years ago, I was out breaking the response by getting out to the wonderful pristine mountains above Twin Lakes just west of Bridgeport, and I just couldn't shake the badness.

Well, one of the tricks I use when I am entering a known mold zone is to wear a hat, just so I can take it off afterward. Keeps the hair contamination down considerably.
And I was wearing a hat I had used for this purpose!

I took off the hat. The response (rage, anxiety, brain compression) all died away.

Put hat back on. The response came back.

Repeated a couple of times to make sure.

Got rid of the hat. It had served its purpose well, but it was time for it to get gone.

-Erik (2008)

*

I inspected an apartment and got slammed in the exact center of the room. Bent over and it was in the carpet. No leaks, no water damage, no smell, and no sign that anything was ever there.

Turns out this office space was used by a renter who just passed away after long illness, along with his very sick dog at about the same time.

His desk was in the center of the room. The place I pointed at was where the dog always curled up at his feet.

I immediately thought, "I'll bet I know why he and his dog were so sick. They brought something in from their sick house."

This was the advantage provided me by military biowarfare training, as bioweapons would contaminate in this same manner. I was mentally prepared to accept it.

-Erik (2015)

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>What if I store my suspect possessions in plastic bags?

You can put everything inside tightly taped Hefty bags and move them to a different room than where you sleep.

The bags should prevent cross-contamination, even though you may still feel them.

In fact, having everything all in one place helps you tell if they are going to be bad for you or not.

-Erik (2015)
BAD FROM THE BOX

I was over at my brother's home when he brought in a take-and-bake pizza. It was delicious, but I got sick with the same symptoms I always get when I go into a Stachy contaminated place.

I thought it was just a fluke until I went into the pizza place and got knocked flat with a mold hit.

I don't have reaction to pizza in general, so it's pretty obvious that the mold contamination made the difference.

-Erik (2003)

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It's not difficult to find the mold in Home Depot. Just stroll through the lumber section. Check out the plywood. You can't miss it.

-Erik (2003)

ELECTRONICS

Strong electromagnetic fields seem to have a propensity to attract statically charged particles, including spores.

Activation of the field oxidizes the spores and causes mycotoxin release.

I've operated electronic appliances and had no trouble with them until they were operated in a moldy environment and thereafter could feel the difference.

I've gone rounds with normies who insist that such a reaction is impossible and with MCS'ers who say that it is, but will swear that it must be off gassing of the synthetic materials and cannot be mold.

It seems to make no impression on their brains when you say, "But I operated it before with no problem and this only started after it was used in a contaminated environment."

The question you always need to ask yourself when you react to something is, "Do I react to all examples of this material?" and "Was I reactive to this particular object at some time in the past?"
It's expensive to keep throwing away computers.

I never had the sense that computers could cross-contaminate things.

Yes, I couldn't use them except temporarily, but unlike other moldy objects, the hit seemed to be pretty well stuck to them and didn't spread.

I wound up putting the tower directly under a window in the spare bedroom of a place I moved to, got the keyboard on a table as far away from the window as the cord would reach, and used a fan to blow the badness out the window.

It only seemed to slam me when I was in proximity and didn't cross contaminate, so I just limited the time I used it.

You could extend that time with lots of fresh air.

It becomes a matter of personal choice - economics vs. pain.

So I'm thinking that if people take measures, they can still use a computer even if it's pretty bad.

Just not for too long, and not in the same room where you sleep.

-A Moldie friend didn't believe me how electronic appliances which are operated in a moldy environment acquire a badness beyond compare until we operated a new microwave that that did nothing to us.

Then we took it into a bad place and within minutes of operation, we couldn't be within ten feet of it.

To complete the test, we then took the microwave back out and operated it in a safe zone.

Sure enough, the thing had turned bad. It died down after a couple of years.
It’s always amazed me that people blame the EMF’s or the inherent composition of the electronic gadgetry, when it is so easy to do this test and find out how virtually any electronic device can pick up the badness in a mold zone.

This acquisition of badness is so predictable that it can be used as a diagnostic of bad places.

If you aren’t quite certain, take some electronic device which doesn’t bother you into a suspect place and operate it for a while. Then take it back out to a place where you feel good and turn it on.

If it slams you, this tells you that the electrostatic attraction of the EMF’s from the device concentrated the ambient level of toxins up to the point of clear discernment.

- Erik (2008)

* 

My computer was good, then it went bad, so I figured that it surely couldn't be the computer itself.

The computer must have picked up a toxin load.

I tested this by perceptifying electronic equipment in my safe zone. After making sure it didn’t bother me, I would take it into a known bad place and sure enough, the computer (or microwave or whatever) would pick up the badness.

Now, there is no way in hell that I can remediate the inside of an electronic device.

This stressed upon me the importance of preemptive action to ensure that objects which have the capacity to pick up a toxin load not be allowed to do so.

As long as I do not operate my computer in a bad zone, it remains non-bad.

And for the computers and various items that I tested by taking them in and out of bad places: I am certainly not going to waste my time in proximity with these slammers by trying to get at the innards where remediation is basically an impossible goal.

- Erik (2009)

* 

Computers would get really bad when activated.

But by testing in both on and off positions, it became clear that electronics could pick up the badness regardless.
Activating them just made it mega-worse.
-Erik (2009)

* 

If a computer is just contaminated with the normal bad stuff, like mine was, I could take it in and out of a room and it would not cross contaminate. Just make the room unbearable.

But if it is the really bad stuff, it can make a room uninhabitable for longer than I cared to stick around to find out how long it lasts.
-Erik (2010)

* 

Moldies eventually wind up learning the hard way to never operate a laptop in a moldy place. The moment you turn it on, it's like a supermagnet for mold toxins.

-Erik (2011)

* 

I found that all electronics attract the toxin.

When I am careless about decontamination I can feel my computer start to act up.

So I just got more careful and it worked out fine. Takes a few days for it to die down, but so far it always has.

For some reason, Logitech keyboards really seem to attract this stuff.

-Erik (2015)

* 

I ran cables in through a window and left the bad computer outside.

-Erik (2015)

* 

When my camper was being plumed, not only did my electronics "attract" the toxins, the plastic I used on the walls seemed to do the same.
I moved.

Got rid of the plastic.

And now my electronics are fine.

-Erik (2015)

**SETTING OFF THE SPORES**

If you go into a building contaminated by Stachy during high pressure when the spores aren't releasing mycotoxins and get intact spores on your clothing, you can carry them around and not have much of a response until they dry out or you get into an elevator or drive up a hill in a car or go into an air conditioned building and set them off.

Things like this lead to what are apparently impossible contradictions in an association between contaminated areas and symptoms.

-Erik (2005)

**LIKE A MAGNET**

When I was conducting my own tests, I not only took a sample of Stachy out to the desert, but I took a cross-contaminated pillow as well.

That pillow could create about the same effect on me at six feet that the source of exposure for the cross contamination could.

The dose had little to do with my illness. This was mainly duration of inflammatory response.

The degree or level of exposure, while not inconsequential, apparently was not the primary mode of this dysregulation.

That's when my world flipped upside down, and I realized that this changed everything.

My strategy shifted accordingly: "Avoid mold as if it were plutonium."

-Erik (2010)

*
I've learned by painful experience that some things have a vastly weird and unusual affinity to pick up the badness like a magnet.

-Erik (2010)

*

You can see a bit of my unusual perspective in my observations about the ability of hair to carry the reaction.

Is this because hair is like a sponge?

Not quite. It is due to the electrostatic qualities of hair and wool to agglomerate ionophore toxins which, as Dr. Shoemaker describe in *Desperation Medicine*, possess their own unique static charge that locks them in place.

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 10

Decontamination

A LIFEBOAT

My lifeboat consists of an avoidance and decontamination strategy.

The key to my success was building a Mobile Environmental Control Unit that allows me to quickly decontaminate.

Regardless of whether you have a safe zone at home, you still need to decontaminate within a few minutes of a mold hit, before the inflammatory response to the toxin turns into a self-perpetuating cytokine cascade that keeps on rolling independently of the initiating event.

That’s why the MECU has to go along with me for quick decontamination.

-Erik (2010)
BIOWARFARE PROTOCOLS

I had a real advantage, especially from the military training in decontamination.

When I realized that mold was hanging on me just like CS gas, all I had to do was slide back into my biowarfare protocols.

But it is ironic that one of the major reasons I got out of the Army is that I hated playing that stupid game.

And here it goes and saves my life!

-Erik (2008)

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There was no speculation, no theory, no having to work out science of whether this reactivity was happening or not.

I simply felt it and reacted accordingly, just as I was trained to do in the Army.

The military doesn't expect soldiers to be scientists and to comprehend the chemical makeup of biowarfare agents. They just train you to look for the signs, then conduct avoidance and decontamination procedures as per biowarfare protocols.

So that's what I did.

Then I noticed that when I was in bad places, others were having a reaction that was similar to what I was experiencing, yet all they were doing at best was to leave.

That wasn't good enough for me. I had to decontaminate.

And it really didn't look like just leaving was enough for them either.

-Erik (2010)

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The Army taught me how to set up an isolation area and decon facility.

It's basically a processing station.

To get into the isolation area, you must go through the shower.

The entrance to the isolation area is mandatory.
One soldier breaking the protocol could wipe out his entire squad.

I remain amazed that no military veterans but me are talking about this strategy, for I know of others who are doing it.

-Erik (2015)

**TEN SHOWERS A DAY**

I test myself before and after entering a suspect zone to see if I am carrying the response on me. If not, I don't have to decontaminate right away.

If I don't feel at least somewhat better, I know that I am covered with spores and must get the little buggers off me as quickly as possible.

When you have the mold all over you, you cannot tell.

So you decontaminate and start over. And then you can tell.

This allows you to define where the plume is so you can live right next to it - even pass through, just as long as you can decontaminate afterward.

I gave up trying to predict where it is. Too many surprises.

I just react to my perceptions.

There are far worse therapies than taking a heck of a lot of showers.

-Erik (2008)

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The key to "what Erik was doing" is moving the MECU quickly whenever I thought I had hit an outdoor mold plume - and then showering.

Over and over, again and again.

Seemed crazy to people that sometimes I was taking up to ten showers a day and changing my clothes every time.

But that's what I did.

Every time I felt a mold hit, even if it were slight, I'd run to my rig and take a shower, change clothes, and bag clothes in a separate compartment for washing later.
"Preemptive," "Preemptive," "Preemptive!"

Catch the response before it has a chance to go ballistic.

-Erik (2009)

HAIR AND CLOTHES

Hair is a really good transporter for mold. I could never use any wool that has been exposed to Stachy.

I read the story of a woman with CFS who tried for years to control her symptoms, totally without success.

Suddenly her condition improved, but she wasn't doing anything different. In fact, absolutely the only thing that had changed was that her husband had retired and was hanging around the house all day.

Her statement goes right to the heart of the matter.

Her husband was probably carrying spores home from work and what he carried in his hair was contaminating the bedding sufficiently to keep her in an inflammatory state.

When you have this level of reactivity, that's all it takes.

-Erik (2002)

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>I should go to the shower carrying the new clothes and bag my present clothes which were contaminated by driving in the car all day, take a shower and put on new clothes, leaving the contaminated clothes in a new plastic bag? Are plastic trash bags okay to use?

Yes, that's exactly what I do.

Plastic bags are great to control cross contamination, but they don't stop mycotoxins, so the bag should be someplace far away, at least in another room.

I do this whenever I feel even the slightest hit or have gone anywhere that I've been slammed in the past.

-Erik (2006)
Whenever I feel that I've been in a really bad place, I take a shower and change my clothes out in my RV.

If it's a really bad place, I stand in the door of my rig and throw the clothes outside so they can be bagged for later washing. Don't want that crap to cross contaminate my safe zone.

Hair washing is really important after a serious mold slam, as it is really hard to completely get the spores out of hair and the hair itself seems to have an ability to assimilate the mold toxins that the spores release.

-Erik (2008)

I just take a normal shower and wash my hair. I don't use a brush.

Not only do I not use anything special, a lot of my decon showers are nothing more than water. For just a quick decon, shampoo or soap doesn't appear to be necessary.

I find that anything under an outer piece of clothing doesn't give me hits the way the outer clothes do. That's why I just use a hat to cover my hair, or just get rid of my shirt after being in a bad place, since this makes a large proportional difference.

-Erik (2008)

I don't wash things for decon purposes if they aren't bothering me.

-Erik (2008)

I didn't do any of that head shaving stuff.

Hey, it gets cold up here. My ears would hurt without my hair.

A preemptive strategy made it unnecessary.

-Erik (2008)
I try to keep my sleep zone as pristine as possible, and avoid bringing mold spores in by taking a shower and changing clothing to prevent cross-contamination when I get home.

It's mostly a lot of washing, using normal soap and water.

If you examine the stories of Moldies, you'll see we spend a lot of time washing things.

-Erik (2009)

>What do you do to keep from contaminating your RV with your clothing?

I drop my clothes on my porch and shower. My "outside" clothes and shoes go into a metal ventilated box.

The crap does sneak in anyway.

But the construction of my rig is almost identical to a “porcelain trailer,” so it is much easier to clean than any normal RV.

-Erik (2010)

I just got through doing the routine after coming back from a not-so-good place, so my hair is still wet.

This is what I've been doing.

Dump my clothes outside in a large metal washtub and take a shower.

Wash the absolute crap out of my hair.

Fill up the washtub and wash my clothes by hand before the toxins have a chance to "set.”

It seems somehow that the longer they are in contact with the badness, the harder they are to wash, so I like to catch it right away.

I'm close to a laundromat, but it does not seem trustworthy enough to use it.

-Erik (2010)
TIMELINESS

I've learned by much experience that if I wait too long, my response goes absolutely nuts. So the trick is to consistently decontaminate before the immune system turns the mold hit into a mold slam.

I maintain a safe sleeping area that is not in a spore plume, as per my ability to perceive it.

I decontaminate before I sleep and allow nothing that has been exposed to mold into this area.

Sometimes it doesn't feel like the mold hit was even bad enough to be worthy of a decontamination - but years of experience has indicated that this is wrong.

Any exposure that is enough to be sensed is more than enough to maintain a low level response that wears me down.

-Erik (2005)

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There are parts of Carson City that are so bad that if I spend too much time there, I'm on the ground puking my guts out.

I have to maintain a safe zone that is outside of bad regions, so that I can drop my clothing and take a shower.

I have to do this fast. So fast that I cannot delay.

For this reason, I have to have a "Mobile Environmental Control Unit" in the form of an RV. I keep this parked outside of bad places and retreat to it when necessary for a quick decon.

-Erik (2007)

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>Sunday evening I opened a used book that I had ordered. When I opened it, wham, musty. Instant headache. I didn't sleep well at all. Monday was a bad day. Today I got up with a headache again. Now I have giant swollen glands in my neck.

When that happens... RUN... don't walk... to take a shower and change your clothes. Wash your hair really well.
After you've done this a few times to see how much aftereffects you can escape, the necessity for having an MECU becomes super apparent.

-Erik (2008)

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Timely decontamination is something that one has to try before they can fully appreciate the benefits.

And as one begins to perceive that benefit, the desire to possess an MECU is akin to surviving a shipwreck, treading water, and thinking that a lifeboat would really be a nice thing to have.

-Erik (2008)

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An MECU is a necessity for people at our level of reactivity.

Trying to fake it with a bucket of water in the back seat of a car really sucks.

But it really is phenomenal if you can consistently decontaminate in a timely fashion.

I thought that I was going to be completely screwed - having to live in the desert.

But I can pretty much go where I want and do what I will.

That's how backwards everyone has it. I do the MECU thing so I don't have to live like a total hermit.

-Erik (2008)

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If I could decon within fifteen minutes after a slam, I could head it off.

After 45 minutes or so, the cytokine cascade had already been tripped, and I was in for a ride.

-Erik (2015)

*
When I was getting kicked all over the place and having to run, I decided to put my effort into the "quick shower" concept.

This gave me the most bang for the buck, and I built up tolerance over time.

Strangely, I rarely have to resort to it anymore.

I have up to about 12 hours to get it done, whereas I used to have to get in the shower within fifteen minutes.

-Erik (2015)

**SUBTLE EXPOSURES**

My advice is to respond to subtle feelings of exposure and treat them as if they were much worse than you think.

Decontaminate to prevent "whatever the heck it is" from going home with you on your clothing and hair.

-Erik (2015)

**AWAY FROM AN MECU**

I've been so desperate after going through Carson City that I stopped at a lake and washed my hair.

If necessary, I would grab a garden hose to wash my hair and change my clothes in my car.

People like us are known to cover their car seats with plastic or towels and drive with the windows open.

As long as cars aren't parked in a spore plume or badly contaminated, they serve as pretty decent decon units when you are in a pinch.

-Erik (2008)
PETS

I've dragged others out of mold hell and brought their pets out too. It wasn't much of a problem.

Dogs washed easily enough and stayed outside for a day.

For a cat, just cover the furniture to prevent cross contamination and wash the coverings the cat lies upon.

-Erik (2004)

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Dogs and cats are self-cleaning.

Keep them outside for a week and they take care of it themselves.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 11

Clothing and Bedding

BEDDING

When I am out in the boondocks with my MECU, I can use virtually anything for a mattress. When I'm in mold zones, a sheet of aluminum doesn't work.

How do I know this? By going back and forth between pristine areas and mold zones.

When my bedding got contaminated, I kept getting rid of it until I was down to the metal structure under my bed and tried to sleep on that.

And when that didn't work, I finally just gave up and drove out to the woods.... and had a wonderful night’s sleep (for the rest of the night anyway).

-Erik (2008)

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I would say that there is absolutely nothing I do that is more critical than making certain I am sleeping on a benign surface.

It doesn't matter what it is - foam, feathers, block of wood or sheet of aluminum. The only consideration is whether it can be kept free of contamination. Things which cannot be washed cannot be kept toxin free.

If I were to never enter a bad zone or never carried spores in my hair, a conventional mattress would be just fine.

But I have to work, and that means going into bad places.

So I use a sleeping system that lends itself to my requirement for decontamination.

I haven't used a mattress or pillow in ten years. It's too difficult to control cross-contamination.

I've got an extra-large camping cot. I have a washable backpacking sleeping pad and pile extra blankets on it for padding. I use a rolled-up towel for a pillow.

It's breathable, so low condensation. Washable and "put out in the sun-able."

Towels and blankets are things that I like to wash in a machine - just about anywhere - but dry in my MECU. Since they are directly affecting my sleep, they are high priority.

I have to keep bedding and clothing bagged and stacked up.

Sometimes I've taken my bedding out to the woods and washed in the lakes - dried in the sun - so I could get a decent night's sleep.

During the day, I keep my bedding covered with a plastic poncho.

-Erik (2008)

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I sleep on piled-up cotton blankets. That way the "mattress" is entirely washable.

I think thin cotton blankets attract mold toxins less than synthetics.

-Erik (2015)
PILLOWS

One contaminated pillow can be more than enough to keep a Moldie from getting clear enough to calm down the response.

I gave up on pillows completely in 1994. I only use a rolled up towel inside a pillow case.

But it does no good if you wash it and then use a dryer which is in a mold plume - as your "clean" towel is really acting as a filter and catching spores from the air circulated through the dryer.

Isn't that just what you need?

To rest your head upon and be in direct contact with a concentrated dose of mold from a filter used in a moldy house?

Because that's what your clothes are if you dry them in a mold plume.

-Erik (2006)

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>What about this washable camping pillow?

Looks good, but I would need at least three of them.

If I so much as wake up in the night, I assume that my sleeping surface is less than pristine, and automatically switch to a fresh "pillow" to lay my head on.

The whole idea of a "pillow" is that it is something that stays in place on a fairly consistent basis. That doesn't satisfy the degree to which I wish to create the best possible sleeping scenario.

-Erik (2008)

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Pillows were the first thing I had to give up.

No way to wash them.

It doesn't matter what kind of pillow you have if it is going to be contaminated, with no way to wash.

I use a rolled-up towel.
I got cotton towels and cut them in half to make more of them.

The moment I even start to think my "pillow" is contaminated, I toss it aside for a fresh one.

I'm in Reno, which is okay most of the time, but bad when a storm hits.

I can go through four towels a night. If it gets any worse than that, I get up and go somewhere else.

-Erik (2015)

*

In a bad place, when you lay down, use a stack of towels for a pillow.

Change the top towel every few minutes.

-Erik (2015)

**IN A BAD PLACE**

If you haven't completely eradicated the mold and removed the colony, it is a waste to get a new mattress and furniture. It'll just get contaminated.

If you cannot leave a moldy place and are just trying to reduce exposure, I recommend covering your mattress with plastic and covering the plastic with a washable cotton pad.

-Erik (2002)

**CLOTHING**

In terms of clothing, I'm in favor of having lots available.

Used clothes are fine, if they feel good.

I've bought enough "warehouse bad" stuff that I wash and line dry all new clothing.

-Erik (2008)

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I have to treat every article of clothing as suspect, regardless of new, used, whether something I wore out and about got slammed and is now bad.

So as long as I have to do this anyway, I figured my contaminated clothing from my "bad house" can go through the same process.

I kept my old clothes in storage, got a few items out and washed them. Put them in the sun for a couple of days.

Many of them eventually "perceptified" good enough for usage.

-Erik (2015)

**LAUNDRY**

Washing clothing is a critical aspect of avoidance.

When and how I wash is contoured around times of release of mold spores.

If it's low sporage, no worries. If it's a bad day, I put it off, or go elsewhere, or hand wash and air dry.

-Erik (2008)

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Yesterday, the plumes were acting up a bit and raking the Truckee area.

So I only washed my laundry there and then hung it up inside my much safer MECU to dry in a good place, rather than use the dryer.

I found from bitter experience that in a dryer, the clothes become the filter that scrubs spores out of the air, so I try very diligently to only do laundry when the plumes aren't active.

Laundry which has become laden with spores usually has a limited range. Not sure why, but I usually only become aware of bad laundry after I put it on. Perhaps the heat from the dryer stabilizes the spores a bit more than might otherwise be the case.

Now, I know this sounds a bit over the top, like everything else I do, but there is a very good reason why I have a wood stove in my MECU.
When it is zero degrees outside, I can get that sucker glowing red hot and pump fresh air through like mad. This lowers humidity and dries everything out - especially the laundry I have hanging on a special rack in front of the window.

-Erik (2008)

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Yeah, I tried the laundry ball. Bleah!

I asked a bunch of people about those integrated RV washer/dryers. Most folks hate them. Not a very powerful washer, and the dryer takes forever.

I find a decent place to wash clothing. As long as the washer doesn't feel moldy to me, spinning clothes around in the water doesn't seem to be a source of mold exposure. Grabbing them out and drying them on my special rack in the MECU gives me the best results by far.

I also carry around a large plastic storage container that I use to wash blankets when I'm out camping.

-Erik (2008)

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I can wash things even in a moderately contaminated laundromat, but I can't dry them there. I can't hang them in a bad zone, either.

So I do small loads often and dry them on a rack in my MECU while parked in a good place. I keep a constant rotation going so it doesn't build up.

-Erik (2008)

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Since it's so hard to find a good laundromat, I have my own wash facilities inside my rig, along with a clothes drying rack.

-Erik (2009)

*

For showering and for washing clothes, I just use soap and water.
For laundry, I now use only a Wonder Wash and a clothes wringer.

-Erik (2011)

Laundry detergents are made from fungal enzymes.

I think our reaction to them is simply an extension of the fundamental biotoxin illness.

-Erik (2015)

I use regular mild detergent.

My efforts go into pre-emptive avoidance. I find that anything that has had only momentary exposure cleans up easily with no special measures.

My laundry wringer is mounted permanently in my shower. Always there ready to use.

I dry things above my woodstove. It dries a blanket in three hours.

People think it’s funny to see a camper with smokestack going when it isn't really cold enough for a fire.

But it gets the job done.

-Erik (2015)

STORAGE

I used to keep my clothes in plastic storage bins. But as time went along and my reactivity decreased, I just started stacking on the principle that it is only the top one that is likely to be much of a problem.

This is similar to removing the top blanket when sleeping, and working my way down.

This is why I don't use sheets. I have about ten blankets, and they get washed every couple of days.
In fact, I just washed them all yesterday. I built a huge fire in my RV and dried them on my drying rack in front of the fireplace.

-Erik (2008)

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My clothes that have a history stay in external storage.
The ones that go inside are on shelves.

If the accumulation reaches a threshold of trouble, I can usually pinpoint the stack of clothing by taking the whole thing outside to check if that does the trick.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 12

Power Curve

THE TOP OF THE CURVE

I don't freak out at the mere thought of being in a bad place anymore. I don't even decontaminate nearly as often as I used to.

As long as I stay on the good side of the power curve, it seems I can tolerate a fair bit of exposure before being driven to a point where the inflammatory response goes out of control.

I'm working in a moderately bad place in Reno. This is a place I couldn't tolerate at all about eight years ago, when I was stuck living in a mold zone down south of Carson City.
Sometimes my workplace gets over tolerance, but for the most part it stays about medium low.

When the place is medium or below, I can stay in Reno and have medium nights from the ambient mold load here.

But if the place goes zonkers, I may still be able to stand it while I work, but I have to compensate by running up to the mountains.

If I have a medium or above day, I want to really get myself clear.

So I kind of project, based on how the place feels during the day, what I am going to have to do in order to ensure I get a good night’s sleep and stay on the up side of the power curve.

You know, this whole process is exactly like thermalling to a soaring pilot.

Like gain a bunch of altitude in a boomer thermal and then you can relax. Glide down to a low altitude and you’re sweating bullets, working like mad to stay out of the trees.

-Erik (2008)

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You know how your car will buzz right on up a hill if you’re at high rpm, but if you were to attack that same hill at low speed, the car will gradually lose power, slow down and stall?

The engine puts out more horsepower at higher revs. Not so much at the low end.

If you're high on the power curve, you're buzzing right along and can take a few bumps without slowing down.

Down low on the curve, there's no torque left to spare, and the bumps will slow you down to where the power drops off quickly and you stall out.

-Erik (2008)

* 

In hang gliding, some "techies" had instruments - altimeter, variometer, airspeed, barograph and GPS.

I was a kind of a throwback to the early days of hang gliding, a sort of subset called "the purists" who used none of these things, and who relied on our senses and skills alone. That was the joy of it.
If you could work your way up to great altitude by your own skill, I dunno, somehow it made the experience special, more of an accomplishment.

At altitude, there is only one way to tell if you are going up or down. Compare your "ground track" against the wind direction. Look sideways and find a low mountain or obstacle that you can look over. Locate something behind that you can identify for future comparison.

After a few maneuvers, chasing thermals, look over the obstacle. If you see your object and more, you're gaining. Can't find it anymore and see less distance, you're losing.

The power curve is a lot like that. Although altitude gives you leeway to work with, the idea is to always check where you are to see if you are gaining or losing.

Even if you're feeling good and have plenty left to work with, if you keep winding up in the sink, the consistent pattern of downward motion tells you it is time to punch out and seek out some other terrain where you can look for lift.

-Erik (2008)

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Passing through a plume can put you on the downside of the power curve of immune response for days.

The trick is to know where you are on the curve and stay above the threshold, no matter what it takes.

And sometimes, for a really ill person, that would be out in the desert and damn near nowhere else.

-Erik (2008)

*

I use the "losing ground" concept a lot.

It is falling lower on the power curve, like an engine that is on the verge of stalling.

Whenever I feel myself going lower, I step up my avoidance tactics.

-Erik (2010)
THERMALLING

I compare this to thermalling in a hang glider.

At first, it's hard work...scanning the ground for signs of terrain which is likely to gather heat, checking dust devils or spinning debris to show if a thermal has been triggered, correcting for wind direction to intercept the projected angle of the rising air, dipping in to see if it is up air or just worthless turbulence, comparing distant mountains to see if they are rising or falling to monitor whether you are gaining altitude.

It all seems so complex. So many factors to juggle simultaneously.

But with practice, it almost becomes second nature, done without conscious thought.

It is weird for other people though, when they are talking with you and you suddenly shift positions so as not to be downwind of them, because their clothing is drenched with spores. They have no idea what you just did and it isn't worth the time it would take to explain.

-Erik (2008)

*

I encounter plumes constantly, virtually every day.

This isn't an "on-off," yes or no, walk away and the toxins disappear type problem.

It's the gradual buildup of receptor blocking ionophore toxins which stay locked in place, and these toxins have become quite ubiquitous in the last twenty years.

There is no such thing as not having mycotoxin exposure. The question is "how much" and for how long - even if you aren't aware of it.

-Erik (2006)

*

Just a few inches away from a contaminated object makes a difference.

-Erik (2015)
GAINING GROUND

Whether the detox continues when you get back to civil devastation all depends on where you are on the power curve and how much neurotoxin you encounter.

If you have recovered enough to build up reserves, then masking/blocking kicks in. With reserves, reactivity goes down in response to minor hits. Without reserves, reactivity goes through the roof.

But whatever reserve you built up can be overwhelmed by a large mold slam, and then you’re back to square one.

See why hang gliding was a good model for my avoidance lifestyle? This is so much like "Airspeed-Altitude-Available Lift" versus "Sink."

-Erik (2008)
*

I've seen people gain ground while in a place that was intermittently kicking them around, but it is so difficult and makes things so difficult that it's a very unhappy way to get through this.

-Erik (2008)
*

One would think lowering toxic load must surely be to good effect.

But this illness is weird.

It is the duration of inflammation that is actually worse than the toxic load.

-Erik (2015)

BALANCING THE BOOKS

> Does being super-fanatical about mold avoidance for a while help folks to survive onslaughts of mold later on?

Yes. This is what I mean by “moving myself up on the power curve.” Or "balancing the books" and getting back in the black.
I can now tolerate a full time job in a building that used to put me under the curve in minutes.

From what I've seen, the tolerance that people build up allows them to withstand higher exposure for short periods, but that is all.

This feels to very much like thermalling in a hang glider. You work your butt off to get a bunch of altitude, and it's great while you're there. But some nasty "sink" can wipe out all your gains in no time.

-Erik (2008)

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Dr. Shoemaker describes how the prolonged inflammatory response continually removes more anti-inflammatory cytokines.

Theoretically, if one had all their anti-inflammatory responses neutralized, there would be nothing from stopping one single spore from creating an all-out systemic over-response.

But the good news is that the longer one can stay damped down, it appears that the anti-inflammatory responses might be restored.

At least that's how it's been for me. By extreme avoidance for a portion of the time, I build up a certain degree of tolerance for other times when I have to enter mold zones.

This wild variability of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines seems to be how people can go through various degrees of reactivity that are so insanely out-of-whack with the "dose-response" model of illness.

-Erik (2008)

* 

I've come into my workplace, which is a moderately bad building.

I can feel a vague sense of brain compression. Skin almost feels too tight and like the beginnings of a sunburn. Heart is palping...just a bit, not too bad.

But I know what this means.

I have a limit to how long I can stay in this zone without slip sliding down the slope to mold-very-unhappiness.
Experience tells me about eight hours.

So I plan to be out of here in no more than six.

-Erik (2009)

**HITTING THE WALL**

“Hitting the wall” is a pretty literal term. Must quickly lean against a wall or sit down to avoid passing out. Can't stand up after that. But unlike normal humanoids, no quick recovery.

But I have also used that same phrase to mean running into a wall of mold spores, as in "the edge of the plume." I guess I unconsciously associated the two, because hitting the edge of a plume generally meant that I was going to hit the wall.

Since reaching the point of hitting the floor goes along with reaching a threshold of tolerance, I resorted to employing the phrase that runners use when they are completely depleted: hitting the dreaded "wall."

Every long distance runner knows what "the wall" is. No mere tiredness there.

That is why Dr. Peterson used the description that CFS is like a marathon runner after a race.

I think that was his best attempt to refer to a phenomenon that only a long distance runner fully understands. When you hit the wall, there is no quick rest and recovery. You are completely out of steam and stay that way for a while.

From most stories I've heard, by the time people realize how much trouble they are in, it is already too late.

-Erik (2008)

**RUNAWAY TRAIN**

Years of experience tells me what I can handle and what I cannot.

There is a complex interplay of where I am on the power curve, compared to the intensity of the plume along with whatever reasons I have for being in a bad zone. All are factored in.
Despite people continually chanting that, "Erik’s solution is a one-size-fits-all," I keep repeating that each person must act according to the dictates of their own situation.

But one thing is inevitable. If the downward progression cannot be halted with whatever people in a moldy situation are doing, the endpoint of the journey can be extrapolated.

Kind of like a runaway train. When you first notice that it is speeding up, perhaps you could jump off and break a few bones, but you might survive.

But if you choose to ride it out to full speed to the end of the tracks, prolonging the situation just makes it worse when the train wreck finally happens.

-Erik (2008)
*

After finding out that only responding to overt upregulation was far too late, I took a sample out to the desert to gain familiarity with the lowest possible threshold of exposure that I can detect.

Then I monitored my response to see how far I can go before there is no going back.

When I approach that threshold, I must take action of suffer the consequences.

If I do so in time, using military biowarfare protocols of isolating affected equipment and clothing for later decontamination, I have had no need to throw them away. Washing has been sufficient.

I get some level of hit every day, but my reactivity has abated to the point that I can function relatively well in society.

-Erik (2010)

GOING DOWNHILL

> Your exposures to mold in the 1990s made you sick, but the ones you’re getting now haven’t done that. What’s made the difference?

The difference has been paying attention to where I am on the power curve and completely ignoring how I wish I were in these various environments.

If a place is steadily driving me down, I must leave or fall apart.

That's it. No debate. No quibbling, no arguing my way out of it.
To stay is to die...that’s it.

-Erik (2008)

*

I’ve been in places where I had various symptoms, but they were getting better and considering the lack of options in to getting to a perfect place, it was only the fact that they were getting better which made them acceptable to me.

If I had nothing more than "heavy exhaustion," but it was getting worse, I suppose it would be the mere fact of it getting worse that would make staying there unacceptable to me.

-Erik (2008)

SLEEPING PLACE

Dr. Cheney observed the incredible sleep deprivation effects in CFS and has seen some success in improving people’s condition by focusing on sleep.

I believe that this is so important that if I were to design another MECU, I would have an entirely isolated sleeping zone away from potentially cross-contaminated materials that one brings into living areas.

Naturally, this applies to the most serious and severe states of reactivity.

People are surprised that I make so little effort at avoidance now. This is because by balancing a good sleep zone against daytime exposure, somehow I managed to crawl back up on the power curve and am not experiencing such high levels of inflammation.

I know it sounds crazy, but these toxins are apparently not all that toxic without the inflammation.

Like the difference between someone who goes into anaphylaxis from bee stings and someone who doesn’t. If the extreme responder could somehow get the immune system to calm down its response, he might conceivably go back to tolerating a few stings now and then.

-Erik (2008)

*
Ideally everyone would have their own sleeping room so each can protect it to their own requirements, which change according to exposure.

I am not nearly so careful as I used to be, as I first achieved a superlative "mold-free" space, and built up tolerance to where that standard is no longer necessary.

-Erik (2015)

THE RELATIVE SHIFT

The MECU strategy is not only more of a tactic than an actual device. It is the only training tool that really allows mold sufferers to gain special insights into the mechanics of the situation.

Especially something I call "The Relative Shift."

A friend of mine had a house in a region that was gradually going bad.

The house was acting just the same as my MECU does when I take it in and out of a contamination zone. Fine some days, horrible on others, yet the house itself felt too good to be the culprit.

The house itself wasn't the source, but it would pick up a toxin load every time the plumes rolled through.

The frequency of plumes increased the background noise of low level contamination that is not readily discernible - or not even discernible at all.

Now, consider this.

My MECU had a set value of badness.

When I enter a contamination zone of subliminal increased ambient levels, I cannot always feel that low level.

But what I can feel is that any minor sourcepoint such as a mildly contaminated object will suddenly feel much more potent.

I knew that this sourcepoint/object hadn't really become more potent.

This was established by simply testing. I would drive back out to a pristine place, and the sourcepoint would revert back to its former level of badness.
The increase in toxic potential wasn’t due to inherent toxicity, but rather to increased background noise even when I couldn’t necessarily feel that low ambient level.

This taught me that I can use the relative shift of a known potential of a sourcepoint to help me identify subliminal contamination zones.

-Erik (2009)

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>Let’s see if I understand you. Say you have a hat that’s mildly contaminated. Then you a low-level contamination wafts through the area. You don’t necessarily "feel" the low-level background noise, but the hat feels worse, which indicates the change in the ambience of the area? And so can be demonstrated by the fact that if you leave the area, the hat resumes its lesser level of ick?

Yes, I could take something out to a pristine area, and it would settle down.

I thought, "Okay, I think I'm starting to understand. It was my immune response which changed when ambient levels got worse, and not the object."

And then everything got turned upside down again when intensification reaction set in.

The opposite effect started to happen.

My senses then went hyper to that contaminated object, which I figured was probably still roughly the same potential as when I carried it out to the desert.

I felt absolutely great while away from the contaminated object, be it MECU, binoculars, or whatever...and the shift in my symptoms to the object was even more dramatic than while in the bad zone.

That's when I realized that this relative shift was trying to tell me something.

It means that I have to get clear in order to detox.

The body won't allow it while in an upregulated condition.

Even a low level that is barely perceptible still qualifies as upregulated, in terms of not allowing detox.

The degree to which intensification set in told me how much body toxins I had accrued while in the bad zone.

The longer I go without occasionally getting clear to allow detox, the greater the intensification will be.
This let me know that I cannot wait to feel bad before bailing out of a bad zone.

I have to get clear as preemptive leap of faith before it becomes absolutely necessary.

Because when it does become unavoidable due to feeling so bad in a bad zone, the intensification reaction from a long-term body buildup of toxins can be very, very unpleasant.

(An understatement, of course.)

-Erik (2009)
Chapter 13

Remediating Objects

BONDING CHARACTERISTICS

Since low molecular weight T2 toxins from decomposing spores can adsorb via intermolecular dipole attraction onto smooth materials, the concept that spores can be washed away from hard surface materials is very misleading since the toxins can still remain.

Just because it's glass, plastic, or a hard surface is no guarantee it's toxin-free after remediation of fungal conidial detritus.

-Erik (2006)

*
The way you are looking at this is dictated by your underlying mental picture of an allergic reaction to spores.

That is correct as far as it goes. But the spores also have toxins, which adsorb onto hard surfaces by Van Der Waals forces.

These are locked into place by molecular bonds and cannot be cleaned by conventional methods.

These toxins have been shown to be heat stable up to 500 degrees F. and most of our possessions don't handle that temperature too well.

We have to wait for them to denature.

One has to think of this as a toxin which has been liberated from decomposing spores but still persists in an undetectable form...except to us hyper-responders.

-Erik (2007)

*

The concept of Stachy growth as being the problem is not really relevant.

It's the toxins.

They seem to have the ability to stick to whatever they want to, even bare metal under certain circumstances.

Leather is especially tough, for some reason.

-Erik (2008)

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What can you bring out? Nothing.

Leastways, that's what I brought out, and very glad of it, considering how the silliest little things (like cups and dinner plates) would slam me when I approached them later.

-Erik (2010)
THE GREEN BINOCULARS

All my stuff went into storage and I was too scared to touch it for years. Otherwise I guess I would have thrown everything away.

One of the things I did attempt to use after fleeing the bad place was a pair of binoculars. They were waterproof so I washed them off in the sink.

I went hiking and was right on top of a mountain feeling just as mold free as I could possibly be.

I raised the binoculars for a look at all the scenic splendor.

Instantly I went right into brain fog and heart palpitations. I could move the binoculars close to my face and get the response, and then move them away and recover.

But wait, this was just one small item and it had been washed thoroughly. How the heck are you supposed to remediate something coated with a waterproof covering better than washing it off under the tap with liberal amounts of soap and water?

I then did some experimentation with various objects that "experts" told me could be remediated and found that no amount of washing removed my "imaginary response" to them.

I then found out about the properties of adsorption at a molecular level that prevents mechanical removal of these toxins.

So I am really suspicious of taking advice that possessions can be successfully remediated in short order. You must rely on your perception of a response to anything you attempt to take with you and trust nothing else.

At the same time, I remind people that the objects that dropped me in my tracks years ago have denatured and feel perfectly safe.

I wouldn’t trust most furniture and certainly not bedding, but other than that, I wouldn’t advise throwing stuff out wholesale. You might just get it back someday.

-Erik (2003)

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As you see with the binocular story, if an object is too close to me that has been slammed in the past, it's just the same to me as if I were in a sick building.
I've been in lots of bad houses that weren't really bad at all. I was just getting hit by the stuff that people brought in.

-Erik (2008)

*  

>What happened when you brought your binoculars down to a lower altitude?

The effect diminished.

That is when I began moving objects to higher altitude, hoping that this intensification of the effect meant that toxins were being given off and, hopefully, denaturing the object.

-Erik (2010)

**TAKING TO ALTITUDE**

Things don't exactly denature in the way the current theoretical model would predict.

Yes, I do put things out in the sun, but there is another way that is so crazy that I scarcely dare talk about it.

Remember what I said about barometric pressure triggering toxin release?

If my MECU gets hard hit, I drive the whole darn thing to the highest possible altitude.

It feels terrible when I do this, but it seems to cause a massive release of toxins and everything is much better afterward.

I've demonstrated this to people in various automobiles, but nothing is more compelling than using this technique on an entire RV.

-Erik (2008)

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I took my MECU up to the mountains last night, and the exterior went "Poof." I could hardly stand next to it.

Then I turn around and come back to Reno, and it feels much better for a while.

I have to keep my blankets covered, since the top one turns to absolute hell after a release.
The stickiness can be taken advantage of. Once it’s stuck to the top blanket, you get rid of it.

But since this crap is trying to glom onto everything, if you aren't in a plume, the rest of it is already glommed onto something else.

So you've decreased exposure, while still in the midst of contamination.

-Erik (2009)

* 

When you take things to altitude, the lowering of barometric pressure "kicks off" toxins from fresh spores.

That's about it. Just lowers the load when you have intact spores.

I don't think it does much more than that.

The more the altitude change, the better the results.

-Erik (2015)

PROMPT DECONTAMINATION

My experience has been that items which were thoroughly long-term soaked with toxins in a Stachy zone can be bad for five years. But items only transiently contaminated can denature on their own in as little as two days.

If something hasn't been badly contaminated, it needs no special treatment. If something has been in the presence of these toxins for a long time, no special treatment seems to work.

So I make it a point to only allow things to become minimally contaminated.

It's not quite as difficult as it sounds. Just a matter of practice.

-Erik (2008)

* 

If I wash things quickly after a bad exposure, they clean up nicely with no problem.
It’s just the ones that spent a long time with contamination that don’t.

-Erik (2015)

**LONG-TERM STORAGE**

Most of us have learned the hard way that we cannot take our stuff with us when we move or the illness simply will not go away.

But even without any cleaning of any kind, after five years of dry storage the stuff died down. Now I can handle all of my things without any problems.

I decided to say "dry" storage because I've seen people put their stuff in those cheap leaky metal sheds and in damp basements. This type of storage provided the mold with enough water to keep growing.

Their stuff is still untouchable.

It must be dry storage.

I'm not trying to claim that my experience or my flavor of Stachy speaks for all. Some is more toxic than others.

But what is the pain of paying for storage compared to the loss of treasured possessions?

Why not store it?

Try to reclaim an item or two from time to time and see how you feel.

(Might be a good idea to wear a respirator and decontaminate after visiting your stuff.)

You might be happy to have your possessions back someday and it gives the appearance of being less crazy to store things than to throw virtually all your stuff away.

-Erik (2004)

*

When my possessions were dying down, I noted that the toxic response gradually abated and was replaced by an increase in the allergic component. After remediation, that was gone but extreme facial proximity brought on a bit of lingering toxic sensation.

-Erik (2005)
One can't kill a toxin, and if spores have been cleaned off, toxins are all that is still left.

If an object is stored in a very dry location with good air circulation, there is a good possibility that the toxins will lose their punch over time.

I packed my books very loosely so the air could flow around them and put them in a desert storage facility. After five years, they didn't bother me at all.

-Erik (2006)

I'm reluctant to tell people to trash everything. There is a psychological response to destroy everything while in the depths of this illness that might not be appropriate later, when the reactivity is more under control and toxins are less potent from denaturing.

My storage area was out at Red Rock, north of Reno, so basically it was in one of the hottest and driest places I could possibly find.

It must have hit 150 degrees in that metal shed on a regular basis during the summer, and I think that accelerated the denaturing process considerably.

After I stopped a friend from packing things in plastic, she switched over to loosely packed. She told me that after five years, the only things that still bothered her were the tightly wrapped possessions. Upon initial opening of the packages, the burst of badness was still pretty impressive.

I don't know about humid climates. Heck, things might even get worse.

I would think it would be well worth it to have whatever is worth saving trucked out to a desert storage facility. I'll bet it would cut the detox time in half.

-Erik (2008)

Although trichothecenes are stable up to five hundred degrees Fahrenheit, heat is still a catalytic accelerator for most chemicals.

Naturally, just like everything else, I can't prove it, but I've heard better reports of toxin denaturing from desert storage than I have from damp climates.
I've heard that in some particularly damp climates....damned if the stuff didn't get worse over time in storage.

-Erik (2009)

SORTING STRATEGY

All the stuff that gave me hits went into storage. I only brought things along with me that fail to make me feel like crap.

Over the years, the stuff in storage died down and became harmless, to the best of my ability to discern.

But I wouldn't trust anything associated with sleeping. Even if things that didn't bother me, I just don't trust them and why take the chance?

Other stuff. Even if it's a little bad but I'm not going to be in contact with it for long, I'll go ahead and use it and then get away.

That's why I can't understand why people would trash valuable paintings. Just how close do they intend to get to it? Can't they enjoy it from a distance?

If I am out of range of a moldy object, that's good enough as far as I am concerned.

-Erik (2008)

*

If a picture has been cleaned, it won't be giving off spores, and the likelihood of it contaminating anything else is low.

The only thing you have to worry about is its range of toxic effect, probably not more than six or eight feet.

And if the wind is blowing laterally, as many people use a fan to blow air from the side so they can hold and manipulate contaminated objects, you can use and enjoy your possessions without having them hurt you.

And who knows? Maybe, if given enough time, the toxins might break down - even if it takes a hundred years.

Think I'm going to toss a "Rembrandt" because I can't hold my face up to it?
No way! It's going to be on the wall, at a distance. I can still have my priceless possession... but just have to watch how I approach it.

If my sleeping area is safe, I build up enough tolerance to work with many contaminated places, objects and possessions. I don't have to give up everything.

So I tell others not to go crazy and toss everything.

People need to calm down, listen carefully and do some planning before they take actions which are irreversible.

-Erik (2008)

*

I can't remember telling people to scan pictures and get rid of the original for that very psychological reason that originals do have a tangible emotional connection to people.

-Erik (2010)

SUNSHINE

I reckon just about everyone uses sunshine to decontaminate.

In Europe, in the old sections, the people of experience still hang their mattresses out the windows whenever the weather is good.

I hang blankets off the sides of my MECU when out camping... but I don't do it in mold zones, because this would precisely the opposite of the desired effect.

I do it for the UV. But unfortunately, mold toxins are pretty stable, so if I really feel hits from the blankets, washing is unavoidable.

-Erik (2008)

*

It took about a year of Nevada sunshine to make my truck feel free of badness.

This just after being parked in a bad zone.

No mold growth at all, so far as I could tell.
I suspect there are others who have bad cars that are like this, and would neutralize over time if only they were parked in a good place.

-Erik (2015)

**OZONE**

I've learned the hard way that there are no end of experts claiming to have the answers - answers which very often conflict with my perceptions. So I test for myself.

I put possessions in a closet with an ozone machine and taped the door shut. Let it rip for a few days and found that it made no difference at all.

There's a huge range in toxicity of spores, even of the same species. Some give off their toxins within a few days. Others seem to have enough toxic potential to give a mold responder fits for years.

-Erik (2004)

**CHEMICALS**

As I watch others reproduce my identical experience, I see them trying all the same things, over and over.

It's been a great boon to the various purveyors, because each person tries each thing at least once before finding out it didn't really work as well as they hoped.

So I'm just sticking with what I know best until I see some really compelling evidence otherwise.

No chemicals. Just avoidance.

Even if some wonder chemicals could decontaminate stuff, would someone with MCS feel safe around those chemicals?

I suppose that if what I am doing stops working, this would be of more interest to me.

However, I have never yet seen a cavalier interference with normal ecological flora and biodiversity be completely free of untoward consequences...consequences that were never appreciated beforehand and only became apparent after the damage unhappily manifested itself with unexpected results.
At which time, it has been savagely difficult to undo or reverse.

For this reason, my life is as free of chemicals and microbiological experiments as I can reasonably attain, given the current state of affairs.

-Erik (2009)

*

I just gave up trying to remediate.

Too difficult, costly, time consuming. It's just plain hard work for darn little results.

My focus has been to keep my mobile living quarters in a pristine place and carefully control what goes near it.

After venturing into mold zones, if the hit is bad enough, I decontaminate and put my clothing in a bag, at a discrete distance.

Normal washing has been enough to return the clothing to usefulness, just so long as it hasn't been contaminated for a long time.

My experience has been that prevention is easier than redemption.

I have been told numerous times that, “Your strategy isn't the only one.”

Perhaps not, but all the time that others are spending on washing things is time that I spend hiking, kayaking, mountain biking and generally being free of feeling like crap.

It's not easy to get this reactivity to go down.

That's why I'm not much in favor of spending time in contact with contaminated stuff, trying to remediate.

Time spent on that is more than enough to keep people upregulated.

-Erik (2009)

*

It appears ammonia is simply acting as a superior surfactant.

And the claims that ammonia denatures toxins seems to be unfounded.
I've seen this same discussion over Epsom salts, ammonia, chlorine and different surfactants.

Whenever one works, it looks like it is denaturing mycotoxins, when it may be that all is really going on is just the action of cleaning.

-Erik (2015)

BOOKS

I've never seen anyone successfully decontaminate documents or books, although I've had a few denature over a period of many years - five or more.

-Erik (2006)

A SICK TENT

I lost a tent up at Watson Lake.

The dang thing had been iffy, but then it got just horrible. It just went so bad that I couldn't stand next to it.

Since there was a lake handy, I washed it. I washed it again. And again.

And yet again.

I used all of my soap on it. I let it dry out in the hot sun. And then I washed it again.

And then I drove into town and got another tent.

I had opened it up a place which we knew to be not so good.... and from then on, over the next couple of days, it just kept getting worse.

As if the material had some kind of special affinity or property which enhanced "whatever" is going on.

Washing failed so miserably that I said that I've had enough of trying to decontaminate.

If any object plays that game with me, I just get it out of my life.

The similar effect happened to some plastic sheeting inside my RV, so I stripped it all back out again.
Looks pretty ragged, but at least the RV is livable again.

I'm still considering my options for a replacement wall covering.

-Erik (2009)
Chapter 14

Water

EPIDEMIC

During the epidemic, the buildings got bad at the same time that the microcystis took off like a rocket. I was quite freaked out by how bad Lake Tahoe looked for about a year.

I saw the green algae all over, up in the woods, but especially on the beach.

It was weird. Everyone I pointed it out to just said, "It looks so pretty." They were certain it must be grass.

I asked, "Did you ever see grass look so green? Look closer!" But they would just shrug.

It was bad stuff. I got fairly sick before I could get away from it.

It still acts up, but nothing like it was back then.
Still, when it shows up, it is odd that people don't even know what it is. They always think it is grass.

Their ignorance tells me this has got to be something unfamiliar...and that's scary.

-Erik (2010)

*

During the 1985 Incline epidemic, I remember feeling a bit off and doing what all of did when we felt a bit off.

Go for a walk along the lake shore to get some fresh air. Isn't that what living at Lake Tahoe is all about?

But something was wrong, strangely wrong.

I remember the sand had been pushed into ripples with vertical ledges. The vertical ridges were all covered with something green like grass, but there was no grass.

I pointed it out to others. This stuff scared me a bit, for it wasn't familiar.

Other people seemed troubled too, but the rationalization was always swiftly made that if it *were* something bad, "Someone would tell us."

We assumed it was nothing serious because nobody said that it *might* be serious.

But still, I can't recall anyone getting sick on the beach.

It was inland, where small streams converge or where the water slowed down for a swampy area or obstruction - in the sewer drains. That's where the "outdoor" badness seemed to be.

But indoors was pure hell. It seemed that something was happening indoors that concentrated "X" somehow, or that perhaps "X" was encountering something that was working synergistically.

But the green ridges in the sand at Kings Beach... nobody ever tried to find out what it was or why this was showing up.

-Erik (2011)
BOCA RESERVOIR

I have pictures of what appears to be microcystis growing more recently on the shores of Boca Reservoir which helps supply drinking water for Reno.

I am concerned that climatic-environmental conditions have altered to favor the intermittent growth of cyanobacteria, and pulse-release of sporadic neurotoxin production may be contaminating the water supply and contributing to the rise of CFS and other neuro-immune diseases in Nevada.

-Erik (2010)

* 

The microcystis at Boca was not in the water at all. Mud only.

I discerned no odor.

The microcystis was more of a burning sensation, while the black mold tended to be more heart palpitations.

The really bad areas were usually some combination of both.

-Erik (2010)

WATER CONTAMINATION

When this crap gets into the water, consider your water tanks to be deadly.

Something came through the water supply that was absolutely ferocious.

I wasn’t drinking the water, just using it for washing.

It totally polluted my water tanks: fresh, grey and black water. All were bothering me, so I got rid of all of them.

But the interesting part was that wash basins that I used thereafter became slammers after they were dry, forcing me to use distilled water for basic washing.

I remember the cyanobacteria I had taken pictures of, up at Boca Reservoir where the water comes from. The fact that this event came from a reservoir I know to have cyanobacteria seems relevant.
This event only hit its worst for a couple of weeks, but some clothing that I washed in that water remains troublesome even now.

I rarely drink that water, but when I have, it’s not been a problem. That makes it more confusing since it's not the water per se. It's the effect from dried residue from that water which has the worst slam to it.

That makes for a lot of pre-emptive planning and action, based on predicting what water might do if it gets into a tank or on clothing to later have such an effect.

-Erik (2010)

*

Once that stuff hit my plastic water tanks, I was unable to clean them.

I removed all tanks from my MECU and am relying on large stainless steel pots for water handling purposes. If they bug me, I can put them outside.

I've been waiting for the water to settle down for washing in between pulses of badness through the water supply, but have been caught off-guard several times by an especially strong reaction to my clothing after washing.

I am currently working on a massive water distiller with emphasis on an exterior VOC/condensation separator, because it seems to be the dried residue fumes inside that are kicking my butt.

-Erik (2010)

*

The water has gone to hell around here. Never been so bad this early in the fall before.

Only in the dead of winter have I ever felt this stuff at this intensity.

I've compared increase of symptoms with what is coming through the water with a few others, and they are wondering what hit them.

Water seems to have "good days" and "bad days." I only wash clothes on the good days.

I've been waiting for the water to settle down for washing in between pulses of badness through the water supply, but have been caught off guard several times by an especially strong reaction to my clothing after washing.

-Erik (2010)
BOILING

When a pulse of badness moved through at the end of summer, I could feel it in the water supply. It "smoked" some clothing that was freshly washed.

It felt like the ick was running down into streams, and our water supply.

I began boiling virtually all water that I use for any purpose, to see if this would help.

All water hits a rolling boil before I use it or allow it to stay in my rig. Washing, showers, laundry, toilet flushing, everything.

What an idiot I am. How could I have let this one slide?

This was always a serious compromise from biowarfare protocols, where all water would be brought in by tanker. I should have done this years ago.

Reno's just as bad as ever, for "Suicide Season.” I'm getting horror stories from my local CFS friends of badly they are backsliding.

But as a result of boiling all the water, now I feel good enough to go for Whitney any time. I've never felt so good this time of year before.

-Erik (2010)

* 

As the cold water comes up to somewhere between 70 and 90 degrees, well under boiling, something horrible comes out and fills the air.

Filtering doesn't adequately get rid of whatever is being volatilized. Boiling does.

I have a bunch of 2 qt. saucepans. It's easier to handle small pans, and the water boils faster than large.

I can fit four of them on top of my rather large wood stove, so I have at least a gallon in process at all times.

I have been opening doors, vents, windows while boiling the water, but now that I have two MECU's with wood stoves, I prefer to boil the water in whichever one I'm not going to be sleeping in.

I have a 50 qt. stainless pan for cooling.

After boiling the water, I run it through a ceramic filter. I recommend Berkey.
http://www.berkeyfilters.com/

The filter turns a weird "pyocyanin green" that matches the color in the pictures from Boca. Not dark green like normal algae, which strangely I have not seen in our streams for years.

I rarely have enough filtered water to do laundry, but at the very least, all wash water gets boiled.

-Erik (2010)

*

Incidentally, my new water filter is just showing up the usual dingy brownish color. So whatever that green crap that sailed through the water supply was, it appears to have died down.

-Erik (2011)

*

There is probably a normal bad toxin in the water as well as a superbad kind.

The superbad kind is intermittent. It goes away at times, but the damage it does stays with you for a long time.

I am not screwing around with unboiled water.

-Erik (2011)

*

I had to re-wash the clothes that were washed in the bad water. Some took multiple washings. There were two shirts that I gave up on after four tries.

For the pots, I just kept boiling more good water in them, and eventually they were okay.

-Erik (2012)

*

Getting rid of my tanks and boiling all water has been a real miracle. I'm feeling so much better that I wish I'd done this years ago.

My grey water tank went bad too, so I don't think it's just sewage.
My main reaction from the water was brain compression. Like my circulation was coming to a halt.

That’s what made the problem harder to find. It didn’t have all the other symptoms.

When a pulse of bad water came through the water supply to Reno, after boiling water, my dry pots had that same effect. But boiling all water seemed to cut it down to a tolerable level.

-Erik (2012)

TRUCKEE RIVER

I just went down to the Truckee River. There is something in the water.

I could stand in the middle of a bridge and feel it. Get off the bridge and it's gone.

My legs went weak. Heart palps. Leg cramps.

I tried this at two bridges. I am going to go check more.

A few weeks ago, I was driving up I-80 and I could feel it when I got near or crossed the river. For a brief time, it just pulsed.

That is the source of Reno’s drinking water, and the tap water went very bad.

Fortunately I have stockpiled a lot.

I have been boiling it, and that seems to help it a lot.

I don't know what it is, but it is very bad. I know that cyanotoxins are not supposed to be removed by boiling. So this may be something different.

It's not from the lake. Lake Tahoe dropped below dam level, so the outlet has stopped flowing. The Tahoe City bridge is dry.

This would be from Boca.

I am experimenting with the water. I bring it in the camper, then move it to the trailer. The badness is moving with the water.

I boil it and try again. Problem gone.

-Erik (2014)
Chapter 15

Practicing Avoidance

COMING TO GRIPS

> You’ve said that this is the hardest thing you’ve ever done in your life. What has made it so hard?

Mentally coming to grips with the reality that such a small and subtle seeming reactivity could totally take me to pieces, if I failed to act as if it were comparable with plutonium.

-Erik (2008)

BIOWARFARE TRAINING

I don’t think any of us just chose to believe how difficult this is. We got dragged into it, very much against our will.
We had to get slammed by this cross contamination process many, many times before it sank in that such a crazy thing could really happen.

It may have been a little easier for me, because I was in the Army and had biowarfare training with a tear gas "simulant," CS gas.

And the mold contamination was acting exactly like CS gas.

This is also why I probably had better results with a strategy of avoidance than many people, because I was simply acting out years of training in biowarfare battlefield survival protocols.

-Erik (2009)

*  

It paid for some of us to stay away from that stuff wherever it was, regardless of what was “causing” the sensitivity.

I used to go sit in my Volkswagen to get away from it...and no, it wasn't the copy machines in the teachers’ lounge at Truckee High School. This nasty stuff was biotoxins from mold.

I treat the burning sensation that Gerald Kennedy described as if it were plutonium.

Literally like plutonium. Like radiation poisoning, as if there are only so many RAD’s that you can withstand in a given amount of time.

Whenever and wherever I felt it, I would do my best to get away, take a shower and change my clothes.

The more I practiced avoidance, the more sensitive I became.

This stuff is in a lot more places than people think, and seems to be affecting people even when they are scarcely aware of what might be bothering them.

We hypersensitized individuals can look at them and say, "The reason you feel like crap right now is not just you. I can feel it too, and it is in the air."

-Erik (2010)

MICROMETEOROLOGY

We all look at things from our own conceptual framework.
I know it seems incredible that hang gliding would have anything to do with mold illness, but the knowledge of micrometeorology necessary to safely practice the sport has been invaluable.

When the presence of mold didn't seem to make sense, I looked at it in the same way a pilot gets indicators of wind speed and direction by looking at various visible clues, like smoke and flags.

The correlation to spore plumes was just as amazing as when you spot dust devils and chase them to a wispy developing Cumulus cloud and find the thermal that keeps you aloft.

-Erik (2006)

FOCUSING ON AVOIDANCE

I tried all kinds of stuff, but I just kept going back to how much better I felt out in the desert.

Finally, I just gave up on all other concepts and tried to recreate as pristine "desert-like" environment as possible.

And once I found out how complicated this whole thing is, I decided to concentrate on tactics rather than comprehension of the fine details. After all, a soldier doesn't need to know anything about the chemical constituents of nerve agent to practice biological warfare protocols.

-Erik (2008)

PREEMPTIVE ATTENTION

There's a saying in airplane-land: "Worry about the ounces, and the pounds will take care of themselves."

It's a matter of constant vigilance and persistence in the tiny details.

Once you have established a basic safe zone, unless you've got a major slam, it's a matter of paying attention to the little stuff.

For example, there was a wooden bench outside Dr. Peterson's office, obviously contaminated by one of his patients.
I sat down and jumped right up. Having achieved low "reactivity" and high "sensitivity," my body gave warning.

But do I want to carry the contamination into my safe zone?

No, no, no. Why take the chance, when pre-emptive washing is so much better than trying to get the bad stuff back out?

I drop my clothes at the front door and they stay outside for washing. I go straight to the shower.

Like I repeated in so many groups, military training in biowarfare protocols gave me a real advantage.

In the Army, I was already acting out the techniques, so now I was just doing it for real.

-Erik (2010)

*

I used to take a towel in with me to sit on chairs in offices and bad automobiles.

In terms of preparation, mostly I would just try to build up as much tolerance beforehand as possible.

-Erik (2010)

*

The critical issue is developing a safe place to sleep and protecting it at all costs.

It is not what you have so much as how you use it. The Mobile Environmental Control Unit cannot be parked in a bad zone, and even passing through seems to carry a high price. Contaminated clothes have to stop at the door.

Bedding is the most important thing of all. I don't use a mattress. I sleep on a breathable cot and use only blankets for padding, which I wash frequently.

-Erik (2010)

*

If you don't allow your car to be upwind of an uncontaminated RV, and stop cross contamination by shedding your clothes at the door and taking a quick shower, having a bad car is okay. (Although it's no fun to drive it.)
My car was contaminated, so I had a blanket that I washed and kept outside the car,

I would just put it in right before I was going to sit. I'd take the blanket out when I got out
and hang it in the sun or wash it.

And then drive with the windows open.

-Erik (2010)

**SUBTLE EXPOSURES**

Mold testing is ridiculous and counterproductive. You are your own "mold meter."

But you have to believe and you have to act in response to subtleties.

Exactly as you would if the exposure were "RAD’s" and you only had the beeping of a
Geiger counter to warn you.

I treat subtle symptoms of exposure from mold as if it is doing more damage than the
amount of discomfort would indicate.

The same as you would with radiation exposure if you had a Geiger counter to provide
the clues that radiation is present.

-Erik (2006)

*

I developed the term "mold hits" to represent a probative state of inquiry...like "web hits."

My friends and I use this to describe a noticeable presence that is a warning of mold
contamination.

For instance, "I'm not too sure about this restaurant. I'm feeling a few hits of burning
sensation, heart palpitations, shortness of breath and impending signs of brain fog."

"Slammed" is from failure to heed the hits.

As in, "Dang it. I wish we had just abandoned the food in that restaurant instead of
trying to stay and eat. I slept horribly, my lungs ache, I had night sweats, my sinuses
hurt, I had a bloody nose, I itched all over and I'm so tired I can hardly stand up. I'll
never eat there again and if I feel those mold hits anywhere again, I'm going to run for my life.”

-Erik (2006)

LIVING IN CIVILIZATION

There is no way to avoid running into mold, but I find that if I can sleep free of the molds that are powerful enough to give me an inflammatory response, I build up a tolerance that allows me to withstand limited exposure to places that used to knock me flat.

I maneuver through spore plumes daily and if I make sure that I decontaminate and never carry enough spores home to allow my bedding to become contaminated with the more toxic molds that I encounter, I can still survive in areas that are far less than perfect.

By persistently avoiding really bad places and making sure I decontaminate whenever I perceive mold, I can now work full time in a building that I didn't dare enter several years ago.

I'm not happy about working in a place where there is any mold at all, but hey, someone has to pay the bills.

-Erik (2002)

*  

> What do you recommend for people who can't practice extreme avoidance, for example, people whose work ends up exposing them to low levels of mold?

That's when you absolutely must practice a strategy of extreme avoidance so that you can build up enough reserve to tolerate some limited exposure, just as I'm doing now.

At this moment I am in a building that used to knock me flat in minutes, and now I can work all day here.

But to do that, I balance the books by constantly looking at indicators of exposure that are usually more subtle than ones people are usually referring to.

Responding to minor perceptive hits instead of just major slams.
People tend to quickly jump to the conclusion that they already know what I am describing when I say "extreme avoidance," often thinking that this just means a "tent out in the desert" even though this is not what I actually said.

- Erik (2006)

* 

I say straight out that I am less than half a mile from where I was in 1985 when the whole CFS thing began... and people still ask me what desert I moved to.

I can't seem to make it clear that avoidance is more of technique than a location.

I have a zillion "feel-good places."

But the one I like to mention because it instantly intimates that there is something weird about what I'm saying is that I feel great in Incline Village.

People are supposed to go, "Hey.... wait a minute" and ask what I mean... "After all, isn't that where....?"

So then I could say, "Why yes, yes it is! But it is still a feel good place.... as long as I keep my butt away from the mold plumes and control for cross contamination of spores."

- Erik (2008)

* 

To the best of my knowledge, nobody else has ever done what I call extreme avoidance.

Just going out to the desert would be the closest approximation, and yes - that really paid off for some.

- Erik (2008)

* 

> Don't you think if you spent less time in your office, you'd be doing better?

Lisa, you felt that plume down at the front door, in the foyer?

If I hold my breath when I go through and decontaminate after I leave work, it's been pretty tolerable.
But yeah, I see your point. I could probably do even better by spending more of my time elsewhere.

Say, doesn't this show that I'm not restricting myself to a life of total hermitude?

-Erik (2008)

*

I felt that no mold avoidance at all was needed in the White Mountains on Crete, and for a whole lot of Greece, for that matter.

But it's amazing to be able to practice mold avoidance in sub-perfect areas and improve my situation wherever I am. That's what's kept me going.

-Erik (2009)

*

A controlled environment is not a place.

It is an "idea."

The concept of pre-emptively stopping biotoxin contamination from entering a location.

-Erik (2015)

LIVING BETWEEN PLUMES

Even though some areas have a higher density of spore plumes, the critical thing is to live between them. It is possible to live in close proximity to powerful plumes just as long as you aren't sleeping in them or cross contaminating your environment by carrying spores home from passing through the plumes.

People who don't understand the principles of cross contamination require a huge mold-free area to gain the benefits of mycotoxin avoidance.

A person who is highly skilled in controlling cross contamination can survive in a fairly dense scattering of plumes.

-Erik (2004)

*
The mobility allows me to keep on truckin' until I find a feel-good location to squat.

I found a good place in-between plumes right inside Reno. I've been in the same place for about a year now.

I still have to decontaminate when I venture through the plumes, but this has been absolutely terrific.

I just got back from a thirty mile bike ride.

-Erik (2009)

**SPORES VS. TOXINS**

There is no difference in physical response between spore toxins and toxins which have become separated from the spores, but there is a huge difference in how the situation is handled.

If I go through areas of toxins, I do it quickly and have not had the need to decontaminate.

But if the air is full of spores, this is another matter entirely, for now I will have high concentrations of toxins in a spore that is gradually releasing them.

The fact that they are still in spores means they can be cleaned to some extent.

Adsorbed toxins cannot, but then, it takes longer to adsorb.

This creates a tactical difference.

-Erik (2010)

**REINTRODUCING OBJECTS**

When doing controlled tests on individual objects, there is another variable that is almost never taken into consideration:

Toxin effects are cumulative.

We've had the opportunity to watch lots of people bring their old possessions into a new house, piece by piece, cautiously, carefully, slowly.
Each one feels okay, so in it comes. More, more, more. Each one, held up to the face - no problem. And finally one last "harmless" object...and POW.

The world stops turning. Everything goes right back to being bad. All of them. Each and every one suddenly lights up and you are plunged right back to where you were.

The effect is cumulative. It creeps up on you.

Every time this happens, it is the last "triggering object" which gets all the blame. Then you find out that it wasn't so easy.

Taking that one object back out doesn't get things back to normal. People wind up having to get all their stuff back out... or even move out.

People get themselves below the trigger point on the power curve and are amazed (and relieved) at how bad objects can just switch off as if they weren't bad at all.

It looks like you've won, you've done it - all cleaned up and safe again.

And then...you get enough of these sub-perceptible objects around you...wham. Right back to hell!

It's hard enough to accept that a single object can have such a strong effect, so factoring in the accumulation concept as a variable factor that regulates your reactivity to specific objects is one more leap that is pretty difficult to make.

So much so that it hasn't really done much good to warn people. About the best we can do is tell folks about it, so they'll be able to recognize what is going on when it happens.

-Erik (2008)

*  

Easiest way to get through this.

Put everything in storage. Take nothing. Nothing. NOTHING. NOTHING!

(Really... nothing!)

That way, if you feel hit, you know it's not from your stuff and can plan accordingly.

If you've found a safe haven, bring in things slowly.

Assess how you feel after each item is brought in.
Far, far safer to go it slow than face what usually happens to people when they take their stuff with them.

Wash stuff first, leave it in the sun, bring it in slow, slow, slow.

If you do suddenly feel like crap, bear in mind that this illness is the generally sum total of a lot of hits from different sources, so you can't conclude that it is just the last thing that you brought in.

Or that taking the one thing back out will help.

It was just the last bit of straw that finally broke the camel's back.

To get the camel back functioning again, removing that one piece of straw is not going to do the trick. You have to lighten the camel enough that he can recover.

If that means taking everything back off the camel... urgh... I know, it sucks, but that's how it is! The camel needs some serious rest and recuperation, after his back is busted.

-Erik (2008)

*

I can't think of anything worse to bring out of moldy house than a bed.

Some people who have bought new mattresses to put in a wood frame have found that the frame itself is too contaminated to tolerate.

But there is no need for you to be in doubt, or have to take anyone else's word. You can test this for yourself.

Clean the bed frame as best you can, and put the mattress in one of those allergy dust mite envelopes that are available at bedding spores.

This won't keep the toxins in, but it does seem to help keep fragments and detritus from cross contaminating the room.

Then just try sleeping on this mattress one night, and another the next, so you can compare.

Shouldn't take too long to make your determination.

For things that come out of really bad mold zones, one night might be enough.

Don't beat yourself up for asking. Very reasonable, under the circumstances.
This whole thing is just too crazy.

I had to ruin many a night’s sleep experimenting with this before I could finally bring myself to believe it.

-Erik (2009)

* 

You can have a bunch of individual items that weren't enough to hit you all add up for a cumulative one that will.

This is a danger of perceptifying one thing at a time.

One has to remember the suspect things and wonder if maybe there weren't too many of them.

-Erik (2015)

* 

If one is bringing in remediated items until they have a reaction, it might not just be the last one that was brought in.

It could be the sum total of all of them finally hitting the limit.

-Erik (2015)

A STORAGE SPACE

> What if I rent a two bedroom apartment and store the objects from my moldy house in the closed-off room?

I tried doing exactly that - a separate room with the door sealed up with duct tape. It didn’t work for me.

I know. It’s hard to believe. All common sense says this would be more than adequate.

-Erik (2008)
STATIC ELECTRICITY

In an RV, you're insulated from the ground plane of the earth by the wheels.

My cot has a metal frame, and it's connected to the body of the rig. In an effort to control the static buildup, I throw a couple of buckets of water to increase conductivity down a couple of feet to wet soil, and put down a ground-strap from the frame.

It doesn't seem necessary when I'm not in a mold zone, but when I am.... I ground myself to the earth, and it does seem to help.

But scarcely a smidge as much as being in a good zone does.

-Erik (2008)

*

I wrapped my mattress with Mylar because the smell of it was making me sick. Now I can stand it smell-wise, but it builds up a lot of static electricity. I wonder if I should ground it.

The Mylar might prevent direct facial exposure, but unless it's an airtight seal all the way around, some badness will still sneak out.

Toxins from a bad mattress can certainly fill an entire room.

I think REM sleep is far too precious to make compromises.

I'd get another sleep system before trying out grounding.

> When I said the smell of my mattress was making me sick, I meant chemical-wise, not mold-wise. I wouldn't keep a mold contaminated item in my house.

That's why I just said "toxins" without specifying mold. If it bothers you, then it's something you probably shouldn't be sleeping near.

Try running a wire from your bed frame to metal plumbing, or out to a stake driven deep in the ground and see if works any better.

Mostly, from what I've seen, if the static zaps are really bothersome, this is a sign that the area is beyond personal tolerance.

-Erik (2009)
IN A BAD ENVIRONMENT

>I can't move. What should I do about the mold in our bathroom?

It's hard to draw a middle ground between trying to scare you out of there by our horrible stories and trying to be supportive of a decision to stay in an environment that may very possibly be worse than any alternative.

A lot of us were driven out to sleep in our cars in the dead of winter because we could not survive for another hour inside.

But if I were in that position and was trying to stay, I would rig up a HEPA air filter with an exhaust ductwork "downstream" to pull filtered air from the bathroom and out through the window. Then I would seal the door shut with tape.

Hopefully, creating a low-pressure system in a closed bathroom would draw spores in the walls back toward the filter to trap them, and the VOC's would go out the window.

I would devise some alternate toilet facilities so that the sealed bathroom can stay sealed. It sounds unthinkable to go to extremes like this, but when you've seen what it is like to sleep in a freezing cold car out in front of your nice warm - but killer - house, using a bucket isn't so bad by comparison.

I'd suggest spending every moment away from that bad zone to break the response as much as possible.

Your bedding is contaminated. I would cover the bed with plastic and wash a cotton mattress pad to put over it.

All bedding and clothing should be washed in a laundromat - not your house - so you can have a lower degree of exposure, especially while sleeping.

Have a stack of fresh bedding that can be rotated through the normal course of spore settling, which forms an accumulation on horizontal surfaces.

Try to sleep as close to an open window as possible, no matter how cold it gets.

When you are at your absolute worst and have the greatest difficulty trying to arise, and just want to lay there and give up, that is the very time when you must drag yourself outside at all costs.

I would have the situation assessed by an environmental specialist who expresses knowledge of the difficulty of successful remediation. I would not trust anyone who says it is easy or cheap.
Your landlord will probably try to convince you that he knows a contractor who can just go in, clean up the mold, spray with bleach and your problems will be over.

For many, that's where the nightmare begins.

-Erik (2006)

*I have to spend time temporarily in a really bad environment. Is there anything I can do to minimize the effects?

Try to get outside as much as possible.

Wash your hair thoroughly just before you lay down to sleep. Every time. No exceptions.

Use fresh towels, no pillows. When you wake up in the middle of the night, fighting for air, switch to a fresh towel.

-Erik (2008)

*In a less good location, I will use piles of blankets at night.

They all have to be washed in a good location. And then, when I wake up feeling even slightly hit, I get rid of the top blanket to get a fresh surface to put my head.

I'm in Reno right now. It was a "two-blanket" night, last night.

-Erik (2008)

*This is the first winter in ten years that I haven't had to get up in the middle of the night and run for it when plumes roll through.

So far, washing clothes and blankets has been enough to keep the badness down to a dull roar, and I haven't had to pick up and run.

There have been times when I should have moved, but by changing to new blankets every fifteen minutes, I got through it.

When things hit the max this winter, I must have gone through a dozen blankets. And I have them double folded to maximize their use.
It was a pain, but I didn't have to move. In the past, I ran out of options except to make a run for it.

So that's an improvement.

This may not mean much to "normies" who can't conceive of what it's like to have to get out of town under bad conditions, but I consider it a bit of a relief from a fairly complex and difficult situation.

I found a place in Reno that is average okay. To get out of Reno I would have to pass through plumes of sufficient intensity that the whole rig would be bombarded anyway.

It's a judgment call between staying at a moderately bad place or try to scream through a really bad plume which can really leave strong effects.

Since I can't do both, I'll never know which was the better choice.

I can only guess at it.

-Erik (2010)

*

I have a good computer that stays in the RV so hopefully it will stay that way, and I have a bad laptop that stays outside for use in blech buildings.

-Erik (2010)

TEACHING OTHERS

I've been frustrated when people ask me to "just point at the mold and get it out of my life so I can go on" and I have to tell them that this would be useless.

They must learn to assess their own response and comfort level, and act accordingly.

Living with this type of sensitivity means that no one can do it for you, unless you are living with them full time.

-Erik (2004)

*
Certainly it is good to have a book that describes the principles of flight so one can basically understand what the controls are doing, but this used to work against us in hang gliding in a sort of unexpected way.

People would assimilate a concept that they "need to do something to the glider to make it go" and would wind up with a false notion that would have them trying to do all kinds of complicated but totally wrong control inputs.

It was actually much easier to just get them out on a flat lawn and run with the glider to see how it feels.

Students were often confused at the lack of information prior to picking up a glider, but it was quite intentional the part of the instructor. You had to get a sense of what a glider does before trying to put all the information together.

This is an incredible amount of information. Before it makes sense, it all has to be "ordered."

When it finally does, things just click. But trying to assimilate it all in a short time is like trying to remember everything you saw at Disneyland.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 16

MECU Decision

AN EASIER SOLUTION

When I perceive mold, I do whatever it takes to avoid being driven into a state of capillary hypoperfusion by watching skin and vein responses.

The easiest way to make sure I have a safe retreat available was to have a mold-free "Mobile Mold Decontamination Unit" in the form of an RV.

Before I hit my limit, I run to the rig and take a long shower. My clothes go in a special isolation compartment to be washed later.

I cannot park the rig in a mold plume, or it will be rendered useless - and I will have to go live in a tent until it dies down.
That usually takes four to six days. If the mold is Stachy, experience says that the spores can remain toxic for years. I simply can't go there.

If a visitor is moldy, they cannot enter my safe zone, and I must stand upwind of them while talking.

If the possessions are clear, there is no need to limit the amount you own.

I don't remain secluded, but when I visit people in a moldy place, I have to watch the power curve of how I feel, and not exceed my tolerance.

-Erik (2006)

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In a funny kind of way, it was giving up on trying to predict where it was that gave me more control. The variables, shifting nature of plumes, and the way they can light up makes it too problematic.

Instead, I focused on a strategy that allows me to deal with it in a timely manner no matter where I encounter it. The Mobile Environmental Control Unit.

-Erik (2011)

A SAFE PLACE

It's horrible being trapped wondering if you can go anywhere, stay anywhere or do anything without being slammed and having no options.

That's why I got a mold-free camper to take with me everywhere, so I can decontaminate whenever I need to, bail out of a place whenever I need to, sleep safely whenever I need to, and just feel safer having a "Plan B" at all times.

Having a "Mobile Mold Decon Device" is a total necessity. I absolutely wouldn't have an acceptable level of control over my illness without it.

-Erik (2005)

*

Maybe I should mention that one of the reasons for perpetuating the RV lifestyle is that after my old camper went bad on me, I "spec'd" out a bunch of rental apartments.

I found a number that were okay.
But there was a huge problem.

They don't accept cats.

It didn't matter that my kitty is a female and doesn't spray. There are so many people with cat allergies now that many apartments simply don't want any cats at all. Period.

Cat dander would bother any subsequent renter who had cat allergy, so no more cats.

I hated being put in the squeeze of having to locate a mold-free place, having to wonder if I might sign a lease and be stuck if a neighbor’s plume wafted over, and dealing with the lack of cat friendly rentals.

I wanted a rock solid reliable Plan B for me and my kitty. And I can't trust conventional RV materials and building methods.

So I built my own.

It has worked so well and been so much fun that I never went back to the rental trap.

I know that not everybody can build an RV.

But if such a Plan B can be constructed, and if the concept is inherently useful to all people with this problem, it seems to me that when enough people demand such an option and signal their desire, it will come.

-Erik (2006)

* 

Imagine what it would be like to be able to just leave your mold symptoms behind? Whenever you want! It's a miracle.

Having a MECU gives back a stunning amount of control.

A storm hit a couple of days ago, and I was forced to make a quick getaway.

It's only after you've done it a number of times and realized the fullness of how much agonizing mold-dreckiness can be successfully evaded that the concept really speaks to itself.

Sure I'd like to have a magic bullet that makes all this madness go away but until then, I'm sticking with a rock solid strategy of extreme avoidance.
The toxins you don't breathe can't hurt you!

-Erik (2008)

*

Regardless of whether your house is good, if a source point gets going upwind of you, whatever you do in your house doesn't matter.

I never wanted to be trapped again without an escape route. That's why I bang away so hard on the need for an MECU.

Nobody would think to plan for this. Nobody says to themselves, "I really need a camper, or some place I can move if my whole neighborhood goes bad."

The lucky ones are those who already have an RV. Hopefully it wasn't too badly contaminated, but very likely it is.

After it's happened and people have gone the rounds of doctors who found nothing, and after they spent all their money trying to remediate their house when it was the whole area that put them under the power curve.....

What are they going to do if they have no MECU?

Well, I can tell you. They just go from hotel room to hotel room, from house to house, trying again and again to find a safe place to sleep.

People who haven't gone through this yet have no idea how much they need one, if they are headed towards this kind of reactivity.

The only people who can advise them in advance are those who have gone through it.

-Erik (2008)

*

Of course I would love to be able to just go to the desert and be as free of this crap as possible.

This is just a technique that allows me to live on the fringes on normalcy and interact with people in a way that would otherwise be impossible.

-Erik (2009)

*
After being forced out of several homes by plumes that blew in from elsewhere, I lost interest in having a fixed-base, unless I could really make sure that it was out in the middle of the Godforsaken desert.

And even then, I would definitely want a mobile Plan B backup.

I need a MECU for travel, anyway.

-Erik (2010)

*

When I was crawling on the floor and barely getting enough energy to stand up for a few minutes at a time, I realized that if I were to completely collapse, most likely I would be found and taken to a hospital where they would pump me full of drugs, not believing or understanding when I ask to be taken to the desert.

At the time it seemed that if I did not make it out there while I still could, my only option was suicide.

This is why I spent all these years showing my Mobile Environmental Control Unit to researchers, explaining that making something like this available would be a Godsend that could pull people back from a very low place.

-Erik (2015)

*

>What kind of home is best?

A mobile one.

Because you never know when the shit might hit the fan at your neighbors’ house.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 13

MECU Use

IT’S A STRATEGY

It’s not just a matter of having an MECU. It’s how you use it.

That’s why I like the hang gliding analogies. The basic skills of maneuvering the glider is one thing. Learning how to chase lift is another thing entirely.

It’s how well you combine the skills that determine how well the flight goes.

-Erik (2008)

*
The MECU is not a specific design. It is a strategy. One can do it in a car or a tent.

-Erik (2009)

"MECU" is more of a concept than an actual design.
This is comparable to what we would call an "isolation area" in biowarfare training.
It simply adds to functionality if the isolation area is on wheels.

-Erik (2010)

A PATCH OF DIRT

The makeup of the MECU itself, while lending to the experience and aiding in its execution, is not the dominant concept here.

If you could put a patch of dirt on wheels, it could be a MECU.
What I'm trying to say is that one has to create an effective isolation area and it just helps a lot to have one that is mobile.

-Erik (2010)

My approach was to create an isolation area within civil devastation using my Mobile Environmental Control Unit to achieve a pristine-enough environment that allows natural detoxification.

Automatic preemptive creation of an isolation area is standard operating procedure for military operation which anticipate toxic exposure of any type. I'm just doing it with mobility added.

Mobility allows me to compare and select different areas and creates excellent options for quick evacuation. The major downside is the potential that my MECU can be contaminated, but the benefits have far outweighed the risks.

-Erik (2010)
The critical issue is developing a safe place to sleep and protecting it at all costs.

It is not what you have so much as how you use it. The Mobile Environmental Control Unit cannot be parked in a bad zone, and even passing through seems to carry a high price. Contaminated clothes have to stop at the door.

Bedding is the most important thing of all. I don't use a mattress. I sleep on a breathable cot and use only blankets for padding, which I wash frequently.

-Erik (2010)

*A Mobile Environmental Control Unit" is far more than just a mold-free place to sleep.

It is a tabula rasa, a start point for what you can and cannot have inside an enclosed space.

-Erik (2015)

**DECONTAMINATING**

There is a reason why I absolutely required an RV with a shower: so I could conduct decontamination based upon the circumstances whenever and wherever the need arose.

When I first started practicing avoidance, I would sometimes take six showers a day, along with a change of clothing.

-Erik (2006)

*MECU needs are very specialized and specific. Decontamination is first priority.

There are plenty of places where I wouldn't need to be mobile if I could stay there all the time.

But if I want to go into civilization with relative impunity, I need to have my decon unit with me.

A small sit-down shower would be terrific, and I think it would fit quite nicely.
Yes, it would have to be shoehorned in, but I'm pretty sure it can be done. There was an even smaller minivan conversion called the Tiger which had a dinky little shower.

-Erik (2008)

*

I needed a Mobile Environmental Control Unit to allow me to decontaminate after going through mold plumes.

Even if one found good mold-free housing somewhere, they would still need to deal with the random plumes.

Either that or they would be trapped in their house.

-Erik (2009)

*

> Hey, how about a school bus for a mold escape vehicle?

I think an old bus would be great, but no matter what, I would still need some kind of small MECU to go into town, so I can shower and decontaminate quickly when I go through plumes.

I've increased my tolerance enough that I can now go through places like San Francisco and kind of make it, but it's just barely.

The only way I can do it semi-comfortably is to take my MECU along.

-Erik (2009)

*

If I lived in a completely pristine area but still had the need to venture into mold zones, a decontamination device such as my MECU is absolutely essential for my comfort and well-being.

Short of finding some miracle cure, I wouldn't do it any other way.

-Erik (2009)
GETTING OUT OF MOLD ZONES

I can live inside Reno and bicycle to work, but I cannot park in a mold plume specifically.

I've been forced out of a number of RV parks but had no mold growing in my custom mold-unfriendly RV. It soon settled down again and felt good when I moved to a safe zone.

-Erik (2006)

*

There is absolutely nothing more compelling than feeling the difference when you move an MECU in and out of mold zones. Because everything else stays the same, the only variable is the zone.

It's difficult to imagine a home feeling so bad by wayward plumes alone, until you have your trusted and mold-free movable home turn to absolute craperoo on you.

So that's the neat thing about the MECU. It helps you to believe that it really is something in the environment, and that it isn't just you.

If you can control it 100% by getting out to the woods, it's not just you.

-Erik (2008)

*

People tend to accept their neighborhood as a base value.

It's really difficult to get someone to accept that their house isn't as much of a problem as they think, and that it's the whole darn place that is bad.

Having an RV and going back and forth between a really pristine environment and a mold zone is the only real way I know of to instill this sense of the differential.

The beauty of an MECU is that when you get it out to a good place and get used to it, then take it into a mold zone, you know that the problem is not in your house. And you know not to waste time remediating it, because that is not where the problem lies.

It's hard to believe that perfectly good looking areas and beautiful homes could all be enveloped in an invisible cloud of something that can keep your immune system from ever getting the break it needs to reset the cytokines.
The MECU is a teaching tool that is almost indispensable.

-Erik (2008)

>I have some items in my tent that suddenly feel bad.
That just happened to me in Truckee.
I escaped it by relocating to an area “between plumes” that I painstaking found in Reno.
I knew from years of experience that it feels like my own local contamination is the prime culprit, but that by shifting locations, my MECU would magically lose its toxicity.
There would be a huge initial drop in symptomology, and then a gradual dying down of reaction to possessions as the toxin accumulation denatures.
This shows me that the effect is more due to ambient environmental conditions.
Otherwise the shift in location would have had little or no effect.

-Erik (2009)

An MECU is a massively useful learning tool for exploring the differential between zones.
By spending time in the desert, your “home” dies down to as good as it gets, and then you can feel the difference upon entering various points of “civilidevastation.”
Since you know that your "home" didn't instantly turn bad, it is easier to sense just how much these contamination zones are influencing your level of reactivity.
What better way to let people feel for themselves that although it may seem like their house is the main problem, it's really the whole area?

-Erik (2009)

SIDESTEPPING PLUMES
It's amazing that there are many times when a really forceful plume can be avoided by sidestepping just a few hundred yards.
Takes a really mobile MECU to exploit this, and anyone who didn’t have the experience of being able to sidestep plumes in this way would be unlikely to appreciate that it is even possible.

I typically take the wind direction and move perpendicular to the airflow. When one doesn’t know the size of the plume, dead sideways is statistically the closest way out.

Usually when I exit the plume, I feel slightly better. I stop and get out of my rig. If the hit feels worse on my clothing than the ambient terrain, I know that I’m out and can proceed to decontaminate.

The rig is a bit of a problem. I can wash it if it's really bad, or go inside and turn on the HEPA pressurization system so the badness remains outside while I have filtered air within.

-Erik (2008)

* 

Not only have I found no cities that are devoid of the really bad mold, some are casting a shadow for many, many miles downwind.

However, I can often move upwind or laterally just a short distance in a timely fashion, and be out of it.

-Erik (2009)

A QUICK ESCAPE

I didn't bother to move to a different climate. I just stay out of plumes.

The best part is the mobility. If you wind up in a spore plume, it's easy to move.

I just drive into town to work and decontaminate afterward.

It's raining and snowing today. It has no effect on me because I went to the effort to find a safe zone to park my RV in.

But there is a fairly large plume just to the south. When it blows from that direction, then rainy weather bugs me. So I just put the key in the ignition and drive out of it and stay somewhere else until the plume is over.

I can scarcely tell you how good it perceive the warning of the impending rainy weather response, and simply escape it in minutes.
Thanks to having the kind of mobility that the RV lifestyle gives, I don't have to put up with being beaten up by mold.

Naturally it would just be better to live out in the woods, but, you know, gotta work.

-Erik (2006)

* 

An ounce of preemptivity beats a ton of remediation.

When I was contouring my MECU strategy, having a trailer would have been cheaper and roomier, but I need fast mobility to evade plumes.

Small and highly mobile was my choice.

So it had to be a motor home unless I planned to leave it out in the desert.

If I didn't have a bailout plan, I wouldn't be able to go into mold zones, visit with people in their moldy houses, spend time acting like a normal person...and still be able to decontaminate before my immune system goes bonkers.

-Erik (2009)

* 

When Reno bulldozed the Park Lane mall, the place where I worked was bombarded.

I wound up parking a mile upwind and taking my bike into the bad zone. Some days I'd be so wrecked I could hardly pedal back to my truck.

But at least it spared my truck from being slammed.

-Erik (2015)

* 

In 1986 I realized that when the toxins lashed out, or "amped up", I simply could not remain in a house.

The toxin level was overpowering. I had to have a "Plan B."

After years of unsuccessful attempts to get back to a normal life, "Plan B" became my primary lifestyle.

-Erik (2015)
A LEARNING TOOL

To help me cut my way through this intractable Gordian knot of entangled complexities, I constructed a Mobile Environmental Control Unit:

A custom built RV that was made out of the most chemically benign and mold resistant materials I could find.

This creates a "tabula rasa" baseline for symptom assessment from which the differential measurement of exacerbation or improvement gives real world clues about the nature and location of the exposure, and about what type of actions are necessary for my situation at any given time.

Reactivities wax and wane according to the duration of inflammatory response, which makes the very notion of trying to establish some kind of standard safe level utterly unreliable and useless.

One must act in accordance with their own varying level of reactivity according to their own current requirements.

I took my experimental MECU to a pristine location to achieve "as good as it gets" for comparison. I recommend the desert for this purpose, although others such as the forest or parks are pretty good as well.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 18

MECU Design

MOLD GROWTH

If you want a fascinating education on construction lending itself to mold growth, visit an RV repair shop.

I toured an RV yard full of recreational vehicles in various states of repair after collision. Though they looked fairly new and no visible indication of mold growth was apparent on interior walls, the insulation, backing of the paneling and wood frames were loaded with mold.

This includes recent model RV's. In fact, some of the newest ones were the worst.

This is consistent with mold hits I’ve felt in many RV’s.

Recently I found several manufacturers that are using moldy paneling right from the factory. The RVs were bad from the moment they were made.
I had a camper turn bad and literally stripped the inside of paneling because mold was growing inside the plywood laminations where it couldn't be seen.

-Erik (2004)

* 

A couple of years ago, I moved out a mold region and was recovering in the desert doing the RV lifestyle.

It worked great until winter and the trailer went bad. I was forced to run for my life yet again.

I visited many people in other trailers and found that for long term RVers, their mold problems were worse than house dwellers.

The roof cap is usually made of plywood and the condensation is pretty much impossible to eliminate. I wanted to find out if any make of RV was particularly immune so I toured RV wrecking yards. Looking inside the damaged walls told the story.

New-looking RV's that were damaged had hidden mold.

The best way to get a sense of what you are facing with an RV is to just tour an RV yard and see exactly what types of areas and materials show the greatest mold growth.

I'm still in favor of RVing for MCS'ers, but I think that the plywood roof cap in most RVs is a hidden and unsuspected danger.

-Erik (2005)

* 

> What makes it easier to find a mold-free RV than a mold free apartment, condo, or house?

It isn't. The problems are the same, but the reward is that if you succeed with an RV, you can take your Plan B with you as you try to make your way through various future sources of mold exposure. When you are house hunting, it's nice to have a backup plan available.

I found two brands of RV that were totally contaminated right from the factory. Not only that, but the condensation inherent in such a small space makes RV's extremely high risk for developing a mold problem.

That's why I was calling for a custom design utilizing mold resistant materials.
It wouldn't be difficult for RV manufacturers to change their materials. They are just now starting to make these modifications, just as the housing industry has begun to do as they recognize the market for it exists.

-Erik (2006)

*

I had four campers go bad on me before I gave up on conventional RV design and built my own. Some of the worst sick "buildings" I have ever encountered were sick trailers.

The flaws in normal RV's are twofold. They make little or no provision for condensation buildup, and even if they have a metal frame, they still have interior wood panels and plywood floors that mold will grow on.

Redesigning and correcting these problems is so complex that it is easier to just start with a metal or fiberglass shell.

I used metal studs placed vertically. Rather than worry about minimizing condensation, I allow condensation to run down the interior wall to a catch trough, where it can escape, no matter how much there is.

-Erik (2006)

*

> Why do RV's go moldy so easily?

Wooden structure itself is the worst culprit. Given the high condensation and no real escape route, plywood roof caps, wood floors and wall joists are perfect places for hidden mold. A tour through an RV wrecking yard is very enlightening.

-Erik (2008)

*

The "mold-unfriendly materials" refers to the fact that you don't want the MECU to grow mold.

The possessions that I have remediated were not growing mold. They were just in a moldy place, and they cleaned up easily.

Just as my MECU has been in many moldy places but isn't growing mold.

-Erik (2008)
A mold-resistant MECU in a mold zone feels just like a sick building to me.

I don't want it to grow mold, because then it won't get better when I go out to the woods, but the fact that it isn't growing mold doesn't make it livable for me if it's in a bad place.

So, the way I see it, an RV need only be as mold resistant as the use it is put to, and the potential for it to become contaminated with viable spores.

-Erik (2008)

GOING MOLDY

I thought I had my camper pretty well remediated. It had been feeling pretty good to me, but then I started having some problems that I could feel when my heater fired up that kept getting gradually worse.

I pulled off the heater cover which gave me a view into the wall behind the shower. There was a slow drip from a pipe that had cracked from freezing. Damn it!

It was just starting to bother me and I fixed the leak and bleached the crap out of everything. I sure hope I got it in time.

-Erik (2002)

I bought a camper and moved it into the woods and had a great recovery, but eventually the camper got bad. I started looking for the mold in places where I felt hit but the wood simply didn't look moldy.

After going crazy insisting that I could feel the mold in a specific place that didn't look bad, I finally just cut the wood out.

Only then did I find that the mold was in the glue layer of the plywood. The wood had no visible indications of mold on the exterior.

-Erik (2002)

I had four different RV's go bad on me over the years.
Couldn't believe it! Despite my best efforts to keep the condensation down, they all grew mold and drove me out. In the middle of winter, of course.

So I gave up on conventional RV design and built my own out of metal and plastic.

Even if you have a mold-resistant RV, you still cannot park in a moldy area.

Even if the rig doesn't grow mold, you can still be drenched in spores from elsewhere.

-Erik (2006)

* 

>I am tempted to dismantle this RV and see if I can find the mold.

I should send you pictures of when I attempted to do precisely that, with a camper "gone bad" that I bought new in 1999. I was so mad that I decided to keep ripping it apart until I found the mold or there was nothing left!

I kept removing parts and finding more mold, until there was nothing left but the floor.

And when I took that away, the area where the camper was dismantled slammed me, even though there was nothing at all left but a bare patch of cement on the hangar floor.

-Erik (2006)

* 

If a regular RV starts to get mold in it, it should conceivably be possible to remove the moldy area and be okay, if it's done quickly.

Wooden structural frames are impossible to fix without ripping off the exterior, so conceivably, if the structure was aluminum, there shouldn't be a problem that can't be fixed from the inside.

However, I've had four RV's go moldy on me since 1984.

In the first one, the mold was directly under the sink on the plywood floor, where a long-term leak had been happening. I tried to clean it up and sand it out, but it just didn't make a real major difference in my symptoms.

Every camper or trailer, I thought that I would surely catch it before things got out of hand and drove me out. And each time, mold got going in a place where I couldn't get at it.

-Erik (2008)
A bad wastewater system or wooden component can overrule any kind of construction. The sleep test is the only test.
-Erik (2015)

When my five RV's went bad, I chiseled into the wood to see how deep the mold was going. It was clearly feasting on the glue, inside the layers of wood. If I have any regret, is that I didn't build my own the first time. 
-Erik (2015)

**CROSS-CONTAMINATION**

I've sure learned the hard way that even a mold-resistant unit can easily pick up contamination that will absolutely convince you that it has gone bad, and must be growing mold.

Just having a mold-resistant escape module is not enough.

If you allow it to become contaminated, it will feel just as bad as if mold was growing in it.

It's totally worth it to have a mold-resistant one, but it's still disappointing how hard one has to work to keep it feeling good.

I was reactive to every bit of my truck. From inside to outside, top to bottom, chassis and bumper.

There was no possible way to clean every nook and cranny, so I didn't try.

I just made sure to park in good zones, and waited for it to die down.

-Erik (2015)
I know a gal in Truckee who parked her RV across the far end of her one-acre lot.

But it wasn't far enough.

The temptation to go in her house was too much, and she contaminated her rig.

-Erik (2015)

**AIR CONDITIONER**

I had an air conditioner almost drive me out of my rig.

Couldn't believe how it suddenly just started blowing “badness.”

Fortunately, I unbolted it right away and got it off the roof before it did too much damage.

I will never have another AC again. I don't care how hot it gets. Just isn't worth the risk.

I built a canvas roof to shade my RV, and this year I'd like to get an outdoor misting system.

But no more AC for me.

-Erik (2009)

*

I built a roof rack on top of my trailer and planked it with sheets of aluminum to make it serve as a sun shade.

It works so well that it is almost a crime that RV's aren't all built this way.

-Erik (2014)

*

I turned my entire RV into a giant swamp cooler.

I covered the entire thing with a tarp and put a misting system on the roof to fill the hot space with dampness.

It works great.
Since my RV is made of metal and Styrofoam, I don't worry too much about mold, and it hasn't been a problem.

-Erik (2015)

* 

A canvas awning and misting system make a great giant evaporative cooler.

I rigged up my RV this way.

I built one that goes over my whole camper.

It is absolutely fabulous.

I love it so much that I got rid of the AC, and my neighbors followed suit with setting it up.

Big piece of breathable canvas as an awning to sit under.

Get a misting system from Home Depot and string it around the edge.

Just one thing. Get an inline filter for the garden hose that pressurizes the mister or the holes will clog up.

-Erik (2015)

* 

I love my "mold resistant" AC.

Mine is a Coleman Max Air.

-Erik (2015)

* 

The AC problem disappeared as a natural course of mold avoidance.

I pulled out the insulation so my truck AC is basically a metal shell.

I cut the ducting apart so I could remove the insulation.

I had to use a cutting disc to disassemble my AC so I could gut it. But I figured it was worth it to have a permanent solution which won't go bad.
Perhaps not as efficient, but not subject to mold growth.

I personally don’t think there is mold growing in 90% of the AC that people think it must be though.

It’s just that the AC sets off what blows through.

I believe the passage of the toxins through the AC is oxidizing them, essentially releasing them from fragments, just like Professor Harriet Ammann warned me about electrostatic filters.

I know that my AC feels fine until I drive through a plume. Then it blows badness.

In fact, feeling my AC amp up when I am driving is what tells me I just hit a plume.

I just shut it off, go a bit further, and see if the effect is still there.

Since it isn’t, I have to conclude that my AC is not growing mold.

So long as I don’t park in a mold zone, and do not bring contaminated objects into the presence of either my RV or truck AC, neither of them has any effect on me.

-Erik (2015)

TANKS

> How can I keep mold from growing in my black water tank?

I wish to heck I knew.

I poured every nasty noxious chemical I could think of inside, rattled them around with rocks and gravel, left them to dry in the desert sun for months, both black and grey, but lost the battle.

Tanks need to be removable and replaceable.

Or constructed of aluminum or steel.

-Erik (2009)

* We’ve already seen many instances where the vent pipes were growing mold.
There is no easy way to apply an agent to vertical pipes.

My wastewater tanks did that to me.

I removed them and even though they were slamming me where I put them, the effect didn't go away in the RV.

I had to remove the associated pipes as well. Yes, it got into the vent pipes.

I tried different kinds of plugs to keep it from getting in the RV.

Massive layers of plastic and duct tape. Nothing stopped it.

I couldn't believe my new plumbing had gone bad and done this.

All that work to make it impervious, and I was right back to mold hell.

And yes, I had been careful with it, putting antimicrobials down the pipes.

Even sealing the whole thing off and filling it to the top of the vents with gallons of bleach.

I completely disassembled my entire plumbing system, sinks, pipes, tanks and vents.

Washed them. Boiled them. Immersed them in gasoline.

Finally gave up and got rid of them.

-Erik (2015)

CONTROLLING CONDENSATION

My MECU was designed with the basic premise that leaks shouldn't matter.

Condensation can roll. I could wash this thing out with a water hose if I wanted.

I left a generous space between the Styrofoam and the metal, so condensation can freely run down and out.

I didn't want to have to even worry about any leaks. Not that I am saying they are unimportant. It's just that condensation levels in full-time RV living are so high that whether or not one has a leak is almost immaterial to the fact that everything is going to get wet anyway.
This is why I have a cot in my camper instead of a mattress. No matter what kind of mattress you have, eventually it will get soaked in this kind of environment. It's unavoidable.

The first sign you will have that your mattress has gone bad is that you finally are able to discern it, which means that it had probably been creeping up on you for many nights. So why even go there?

-Erik (2008)

* 

My Mobile Environmental Control Unit (MECU) is a custom built RV that has nothing for mold to grow on.

Considering the condensation problems in RV's, leaks don't even matter. In the winter, there's going to be plenty of water whether there is a leak or not.

So better to just construct the habitat out of mold-unfriendly materials, so it could leak and it still wouldn't matter.

-Erik (2008)

* 

Without suitable substrate to grow on, there will be no mold no matter how much condensation is present.

That is why I built my custom RV with a metal frame and with a quarter-inch air gap between the interior Styrofoam and exterior metal shell - to allow condensation to occur at any level yet remain harmless.

Unlike conventional RV construction, I have no need to control condensation at all.

> As you drive that RV down the street, you will create various pressures all around the unit. As a result particles will migrate in and around the interior layers. Thereafter when the condensation occurs you now have a food source and moisture. That would present a reasonable ecology for growth.

I guess I should have mentioned that it has an external aperture that feeds a HEPA positive air pressure system, to account for that very phenomenon and also to allow me to drive through mold zones without contaminating the interior with spores.
> Mold grows very well on wet dust. If you visit Great Britain you will note that they have a problem of mold growth on glass: the mold grows on the dust that adheres to the wet glass.

Mold can only grow on the substrate of dust and organic material that is stuck to the metal and glass, but not on bare metal/glass itself, to the best of my knowledge.

This is why metal ductwork is so problematic. The electrostatically charged dust particles glom onto ductwork, providing a feast for spores if condensation is also present.

However, I did take this into account by constructing my rig with interior walls/insulation that are removable from the inside, giving me access to any problem that might potentially develop.

But I'm sure doing my best to make it tough for the little buggers to get a foothold, and it's paid off so far.

-Erik (2008)

*

After going through four RV's in what is considered an extremely dry climate, I decided that condensation is an unavoidable fact of life.

I built my own RV out of metal and plastic, because I didn’t want to have to crawl out and live in a tent in the middle of winter again.

Better to have nothing inside the RV that mold can grow on, and then you don't have to worry about condensation.

Or at least, that was my philosophy.

-Erik (2009)

*

>Wonder if there’s a rigid foam manufactured with channels so it could vent bottom to top?

This is why I built my RV with aluminum exterior that is riveted to the metal studs.

This automatically created that vertical channel for an airspace to create convective drying in inaccessible places.

The water can condense on the outer aluminum sheath all it wants.
It simply runs down to the lower frame, and out through drain holes.

If you go to the RV wrecking yard, you see that walls are constructed in such a way that moisture can never escape, and that even in rigs that never leaked, the wood at the bottom of the wall is rotted out from interior condensation alone.

I looked at that, years ago, and said, "I don't need this crap."

Since manufacturers didn't seem to understand the problem, I had little choice but to build something the way I wanted it.

-Erik (2009)

**ROOF CAP**

I had a new trailer go bad on me a few years ago.

As winter progressed and condensation got worse, the bathroom became progressively more intolerable.

I ripped out virtually everything in that bathroom, until there was nothing left but the ceiling and floor. All facilities. All the walls. All the insulation. Everything.

It made no difference. I couldn't get rid of the badness.

It was an empty shell except for the roof, which didn't appear to be as bad as I would imagine it must to cause such pain.

The ceiling had wood which used to be light in color, and still was elsewhere. This was dark and discolored and had all the appearance of water damage, without any leaks in the roof. Purely from condensation.

I could feel strong hits when I put my face close to this area.

When I chiseled into the layers of wood, there it was!

The plywood roof cap was growing mold inside the layers and the condensation there was unstoppable.

Lowering humidity or using fans or trying to control humidity just doesn't work here.

The cold outside and the warmth inside creates a condensation interface that means some moisture on the exterior wood panel is absolutely inevitable.
I had to remove the roof and replace the plywood cap.

Nothing less had the slightest effect in diminishing my symptoms.

So now I have an RV with a roof cap made of a signboard material called Econolite. It's a sandwich of two sheets of aluminum over a corrugated plastic matrix that makes a terrific replacement for plywood. The guarantee to be mold-proof is written right on the Econolite.

-Erik (2006)

*

I agree about the cover for the slide out, but long term I find that the roof cap is the most troublesome spot. That's where most condensation in RV's is concentrated. You can see the wood swell and bow up in the plywood-capped RV's that people are using year round.

Been in plenty of sick RV's. Just like with sick buildings, people very often have no idea why their health is so bad.

If I were you, I'd take the summer to replace the roof cap with a mold resistant material, even if it is a new RV.

Seems crazy, but it is horrible to have your refuge go bad in the middle of winter. Been there and done it.

-Erik (2006)

COLD WEATHER

Another reason for building my own MECU is that RV manufacturers are dumb when it comes to designing for very cold weather. One can just go around to RV parks in the winter and see all the ways people are trying to keep their rigs from freezing up.

Not only do I have triple the normal amount of insulation for an RV, but my entire water system is inside.

But if you have to, heat tape around the outside pipes. Covering with a thermal tape wrap gives you the option of unfreezing with little trouble.

I would get a dual stage RV propane forced air furnace. Nice and quiet at the low setting, but powerful enough to heat an entire trailer.
People will look askance, and say that is too much for such a small space, but I’d do it anyway. That way, it would be more than enough heat for the times when a fresh-air mix is needed to compensate for interior contamination.

-Erik (2008)

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For tent camping in cold weather, a forced air RV propane furnace is the way to go.
The little "suburban" style that is found in campers is used by tent people.
Radiant and catalytic heaters are killers.
You need a heat exchanger, a "forced air" furnace.

-Erik (2015)

WOOD STOVE

I started out with an oil-filled safe radiant heater and a long extension cord.
Later I added another electric heater, a propane heater and finally a custom built titanium wood stove.
It’s a comforting feeling to know that as long as there is a stick of wood to be found, I never have to be cold again.
The fireplace has an external air intake so I don’t have to worry about oxygen depletion.
It’s kind of like a Franklin wood stove.
Since the fire is already going for heating purposes, I use it for most of my cooking.
Cuts my propane bill down by 90%.
I had the stove built for me by this guy. He builds them to order.
http://www.fourdog.com/
I knew it was going to be really useful so I splurged. It’s the Ultra Lite 1, because I wanted to keep it light as possible.
I get a lot of strange looks from people who are surprised to see a smoke coming from a stack on an RV. But when they see how it works, they all want one.
I simply modified a wood stove to have an external air supply and made a slide valve to control how the fire is banked for a slow burn. I bank down the coals and it keeps the RV warm all through those snowy nights.

But one has to be selective about the wood, of course.

I gather it, box it, bag it, and it goes through a process of careful consideration before it comes in the door.

The wood that gives me hits is used only for outdoor campfires.

-Erik (2006)

* 

> When in the Godforsaken desert, how does sleeping in the camper vs. the tent compare for you?

No difference at all between tent and camper.

This is where the wood stove I installed really shines. When I'm in recovery intensification mode and get that hit from the breath, I get the stove glowing red hot and open up the roof vents.

So I have massive amounts of fresh air pumping through a small but warm and comfortable space.

There is rather an art to wood stoves.

Everyone tells me that I shouldn't recommend it to anyone and that most people would kill themselves with carbon monoxide if they tried to operate a wood stove in a small space like I do.

To make mine more controllable, in addition to the slide valve on the door and the damper in the flue, it has a variable external feed for outside air.

I grew up with wood stoves, and it is a bit of a foreign concept to me that some people don't know how to control them.

I know that there are folks out there who don't have enough experience to do this safely. But I don't see any reason that they couldn't learn, if they wanted to.

One could put a really huge forced-air propane furnace in their rig and get the same effect, but since I am out in the woods so much, why not burn wood? It's free, so my propane bill doesn't change from summer to winter.
I know it sounds silly, but putting a wood stove in my RV has been one of the most effective therapeutic interventions I could ever have conceived of.

-Erik (2008)

*

That fireplace is one of the best things I ever did, against all the advice of others.

It's in the teens around here, and I've got the back door open.

The other totally awesome function about the wood stove is that it draws so much air during combustion that my inside air turnover rate is phenomenal, while still staying warm.

Of course, one wouldn't want to close up the rig too much and risk dying of oxygen deprivation.

Most people tell me not to advise others on this, because handling a wood stove is a kind of art form and can be quite dangerous.

But fast air turnover has proven to be a real advantage.

-Erik (2010)

**SLEEP SURFACE**

Somewhere I have a picture of the mattress from my new RV after some months of use. I wrapped it in plastic straight off and thought that this was a good preventive measure.

But eventually even through the plastic, I could feel that this the mattress went bad. When I unwrapped it, you could see the outline of where I sleep delineated in pure mold.

Mold really grows well on the foam cushions in RV's. I fought with that for years and kept replacing with more foam.

Just smell that new foam that they use. Loaded with stuff that I don't want to breathe, and there's no real reason to. I just use towels or blankets folded to approximate the size of the zipperied covers.

They look about the same. But this way, you can wash them if you get spore plumed.
The closed cell Therm-a-Rest backpacking pads, available at any mountaineering store, wash easily and are supposed to be CFC free. That's the best sleeping system I've found.

-Erik (2006)

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While my chemical intolerances have abated to the point that I could use a vinyl inflatable, I see absolutely no value in trying to achieve restorative sleep on such a highly questionable surface when better alternatives can make such a difference.

Plus the dang things have no insulation and are freezing cold. The air circulation just sucks the warmth right out of you.

They required so much insulation on top that I could pretty much sleep on just whatever material I used for insulation, so that's what I did.

I recommend the backpacking solid foam Therm-a-Rest mattresses, since they can be easily washed and quickly dried after cross contamination.

I washed five or six sleeping bags in a good laundromat, kept them in plastic bags until use, and piled them up to make a mattress.

When the top one became contaminated, I'd just put it to one side and move to a fresh surface. By keeping rotation going of a pristine sleeping surface, I could make my nights much more comfortable.

And setting up a tent with one of those safe electric oil-radiant heaters from Home Depot inside is fairly comfortable. Plus you can run a HEPA filtration system inside the tent and reduce overall spore exposure slightly.

-Erik (2006)

CABINETS

I'm not a huge fan of metal cabinets.

Great in principle, but in practice, very cold-conductive and uncomfortable.
I would use shelves and removable wood facings.

- Erik (2015)

**HEPA FILTER**

I just have a cheap HEPA that I use to keep contamination of my RV minimal. It serves as a catch filter, but then I have to get it away from me. Once it's contaminated, it throws out its own zone.

- Erik (2005)

*I*

I have a HEPA positive air pressure system that force-feeds air into my sealed RV so that I can move through spore plumes without getting too blasted on the inside. This allows me to pass through plumes with greater impunity, but not to remain in one. If my MECU is parked in a bad zone for long, I can't even stand next to it due to the contamination on the exterior, so I carefully "perceptify" wherever I propose to park. When my rig gets plumed, even if the badness is on the outside, I can't even stand next to it.

That means that even when I get out of a bad zone, I can't open a window, door, vent, or be within twenty feet of it without feeling hit. Not really acceptable.

So when my rig is being blasted with spores, I make every effort to minimize the time it is in a spore plume.

Still, I have been caught from time to time. When Park Lane Mall was being torn down, I just plain had to get me and my MECU out of there until the worst of it was over.

And when I get hit by a plume, my tolerance goes down and I am less able to withstand mildly contaminated objects that would otherwise be fine.

- Erik (2008)

*I*
> You tell people not to use filters but then have one in your MECU. Are you doing something different with it?

Ah, yes. I do indeed see it much, much differently! In how I use it.

This is only to protect the interior as much as possible while I pass through plumes or park temporarily in a moderate zone.

If an area is bad enough to require a filter, it is no place I want to be. When a wayward plume comes my way, the point at which I would perceive a filter is necessary is the precise point at which I know that I had better not stay there for very long.

I don't use a filter to try to remain in a bad place. My pressurization system is only to reduce contamination while I bail out.

-Erik (2008)

*I wonder what would be involved in getting a HEPA pressurization system in an RV.*

The pressurization system is easy. That's something that anyone could do. I predict that HEPA pressurization will be standard in automobiles in about two years.

I would probably cut a hole in the floor for an intake and simply route it through a filter system. There's nothing complicated about it.

Just something that takes exterior air and pressurizes the interior through the HEPA filter so some of the nasties stay outside. Like unhappy mosquitos that glare at you through the window, frustrated because they can't get in.

-Erik (2008)

*This is the marvelous advantage conferred by a Mobile Environmental Control Unit.*

One uses their perception of exposure to remove it from mold zones before it becomes problematically contaminated with fungal detritus, regardless of whether this also contains viable spores.

Mine is pressurized through a HEPA system so I can pass through plumed areas with relative impunity, but parking in one for extended periods is beyond my tolerance level.

-Erik (2008)
Here’s the reason I dismantled the HEPA pressurization system.

It did help a bit, which only gave my MECU more time to become so horribly contaminated that when I did move the damn thing, I could hardly stand to be next to it.

I decided that I would rather get the full warning and be forced to move, even in the middle of the night.

By comparing the outcomes, I feel that moving immediately is vastly better.

-Erik (2010)

FORMALDEHYDE

Campers like EagleCap are using aluminum frames, fiberglass shell, styrofoam insulation and high-quality paneling containing a minimum of formaldehyde - construction more suitable for people with sensitivities.

-Erik (2006)

RV STYLES

I built the truck camper from the ground up. I have a 3/4 ton truck.

I prefer the camper for traveling. But my trailer has more room.

-Erik (2015)

* 

Behind the seat of my RV, I have my own "mini MECU.” Kind of a Plan C.

It’s a fully stocked backpack, ready to pick up and go. Tent, bags, food, cooking gear.... everything except water.

It’s what I use if my MECU gets too screwed up to handle because I got hit with a mold plume that I didn’t catch in time to get safely out.
I've only had to use my mini-MECU about half a dozen times in the last five years, but I was awful glad to have it ready when I needed it.

-Erik (2008)

**RV PARKS**

Got to be careful. There are of bad RV parks.

And there are lots of bad RV's that you wouldn't want to be parked next to. Worse than bad buildings.

When I am in a bad RV park and get hit by a wayward spore plume - or even when I'm out in the mountains, as I was at Wolf Creek when a bad RV pulled in upwind of me - I have to move just as surely as if I were in a moldy building.

Watch out for those too-good-to-be-true RV deals.

Reno is an expensive area with few RV parking options inside populated areas, but there is no extra charge for water or electricity in these parks. TV and phone are often included.

Local monthly rates range from $430 a month to $560.

Propane is the major expense for most people.

Apartments around here start at about $900 a month.

I spend a lot of time in the mountains.

Not only is it cheaper and makes me feel better, but the scenery is much nicer.

This lifestyle wasn't dictated by expense or choice, but by pure necessity.

-Erik (2006)

*

I anticipated not being able to stay in campgrounds, near moldy trailers.

But lately, my tolerance level has risen to a point that I'm not having any serious problems in Reno.

So that's where I am now, at an RV park.
I had to go through a dozen RV parks before I found one that is good enough. Still, I park on the upwind side to avoid the other moldy RV's that are certain to be here.

That's the advantage of extreme mobility with an MECU.

If the wind shifts, I simply drive away until the plume dies down.

If I'm quick about it, the contamination has been tolerable for me.

Many times, I've been out wilderness campgrounds and had to move, because some bad RV parked upwind of me.

-Erik (2009)

**TAP WATER**

It occurred to me that if mold were in the air, it would certainly be washed into the water supply. How could it not?

There must be times when the toxin level pulses, according to climactic conditions, rain, wind, runoff, etc.

I boil water when the water feels good and stockpile my "feel-good water" for the bad times when I don't want to drink, wash or have anything to do with what comes through the pipes.

I'm such a nutcase about this that my RV has been modified to have a stainless steel cooling tank for boiled water, and that is all I use for everything. No "street water" makes it into my rig until it has been treated.

I filter the water that I am going to drink. At least, most of the time.

But showers with boiled water are refreshing beyond expectations.

It doesn't seem necessary to bring it up to a full boil, although I do it anyway.

When a pulse of something distasteful comes through the water system, it seems to release its "whatever" at just under boiling temperature. With a low ceiling in the MECU, I can feel it leaving as it sails through the vents.

Seems to me that whatever it is, better to have it gone.

-Erik (2011)
It wasn't enough to stop using bad water. I had to get rid of the holding tanks.

When I put my holding tanks at a distance, I could feel that they had turned bad.

That's a major reason I think it's a good idea to just start with a cargo trailer with no tanks. It's hard to make the leap of ripping everything out. It's better just to not have them to begin with.

I also shifted over to a strategy of boiling virtually every drop of water that I use. I don't have a single drop of water that has not been boiled.

Crazy, but it really took the edge off everything.

I reinstalled a water pump and new pipes for a shower and sink, but that's it. No holding tanks at all. My sink just drains into a bucket.

The critical thing, though, seems to be boiling the water.

I can only tell when the water goes bad after the fact. So I'm boiling all of it.

The green color in the filter only happens occasionally now. I still filter water for drinking, but just boiling seems to be okay for coffee.

After I became reactive to washed clothing, I thought I was doomed. Boiling was a crazy experiment, but it seemed to pay off, so why not?

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 19

MECU Ready-Built Options

CHOOSING THE MECU

If I were in your position, I'd try to find a dealer who would let me sleep in the RV before buying.

If it felt OK, I'd go for it, and if it started to feel not so good, then I would do whatever it takes to correct the problem.

The basis being that "whatever it takes" would not be all that much different than starting from scratch. At least you might have some fun before it goes bad.

-Erik (2008)
RV MANUFACTURERS

All the conventional RV's I saw that were properly built for long term use were far out of my price range.

But there are some medium priced RV's that are so close to being safe that if you could intercede at the factory and substitute aluminum roof caps and floors instead of plywood, they'd be very trustworthy.

The only way I see to get reliable RV's for Moldies at reasonable cost is to persuade RV manufacturers to make some modifications.

-Erik (2006)

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I haven't found any brand that I would trust. The materials have really gotten bad since wood prices went out of sight and good kiln dried wood became a thing of the past.

-Erik (2007)

AIRSTREAM CONVERSIONS

I talked with a guy who modifies Airstreams for MCS'ers four years ago. He agreed that this specialty rebuild is economically out of reach for most financially devastated people.

He told me that aluminum Airstreams are good as long as the metal frame doesn't make contact with cellulose or any mold-supporting media.

So an aluminum trailer is fine as long as condensation doesn't reach mold suitable substrate.

That was one of the modifications he made to his Airstreams.

They still have a plywood floor, so that area still retains unsafe potential. If you want to see just how unsafe, go to an RV wrecking yard and find some old, well-used rigs and smash the plywood apart. You will be amazed at what you find hidden in the glue layers.

Not only that, but the metal skin of an Airstream is highly condensation intensive, more than enough to provide interior wood walls with sufficient moisture.

-Erik (2005)
I wouldn't recommend buying a new Airstream. I'm talking about getting an old one, gutting it, and completely redesigning the interior. Even aluminum trailers aren't mold proof if the condensation can reach anything that mold can grow on.

I talked to someone who rebuilds Airstreams for MCS'ers and he said that even though the ribs are metal, the panel is still too close to the walls to be mold proof. He has seen a lot of mold in conventional Airstreams.

I just looked at an Airstream the other day that had mold on the foam carpet backing. They can be as bad as anything else, if they aren't modified.

-Erik (2006)

That's the number one problem with Airstreams:

The walls are built on top of the plywood subfloor.

That is exactly where the condensation strikes, the mold grows, and it is nearly impossible to do anything about it.

-Erik (2015)

**COMMERCIAL RV'S**

I've been eyeing those fiberglass cargo van body conversions, thinking this would serve as a much easier basis for an MECU even if it is less stealthy than a Sprinter.

-Erik (2008)

Holey Moley! Check out the new Ecologic lightweight trailer from Dutchman. Pretty darn cool.

-Erik (2008)
I've been looking at a nifty Winnebagel van conversion called View. It's about the right size, mobile, mostly aluminum frame, good mileage, and looks respectable, which goes a long way toward pushing the boundaries on parking.

-Erik (2008)

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I think the Casita is so close to being as good as it gets that I would just go ahead. What would be worse?

Starting from total scratch, or trying to get something that was bad out of a mostly good RV?

About the only part of a Casita that I could see as being extremely difficult would be the floor.

So the question is whether or not they use bad plywood in construction. I'd have to sleep in one to know for sure, or go to the factory.

-Erik (2008)

*

>What do you think of this trailer?

>http://www.livinlite.com/camplite-overview.php

Trailer looks too awesome for words!

Perfect.

-Erik (2009)

*

I saw a Camplite last summer, and it just took my breath away how perfect it is.

I'd be all over one, except I wanted more room and carrying capacity.

The drawback to a trailer is that there are very few places to park one for any length of time except RV or trailer parks.

-Erik (2010)
VANS

If I had nothing more than a car to help me deal with this, it would preferably be a van of some kind.

I would avoid parking it in a place I perceived to be a mold zone.

I would spend as little time as possible in the bad house, and as much time as possible in the car.

Actually, that's exactly how I first got started.

Volkswagen Westphalia. You know, the pop-top camper model.

Piece of junk, very cold. It was weird. In cold weather, it was often colder inside than outside unless the heater was running full blast. But somehow, I still have fond memories of it.

I guess that was because it was still better than the alternative.

I got an old propane forced air furnace from an RV wrecking yard and installed it in my van, with a spare battery and a battery isolator so as not to drain the main battery. That leaves you unable to start the engine.

Mechanics won't touch this sort of thing because of the danger of explosion and liability issues, but even they will acknowledge that if you follow the rules, it can be done safely.

-Erik (2006)

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I can't think of any way I could have possibly gone to Boston without paying a price for it.

I would have to scope out a safe zone and set up a decontamination strategy for quick use.

My choices are dictated by the need to decon.

I'm not one of those people who can spray Thieves’ Oil and be all better.

If I can drive there, no problem.

If I were to fly, I would have to take my backpack, in case I can't find a decent hotel room.
I have a large camper. Not great on gas.

If I had to cross the country, I would prefer to outfit a minivan as a mini MECU.

I would consider that the number one priority, because you need some way to get on top of the power curve, no matter where you are.

If I had to drive across the country, it would just about be worth it to make a small camper shell MECU rather than haul the full size one.

I would install a propane furnace, a small refrigerator, a bed and a sit-down shower.

-Erik (2015)

*  

If Sprinters had been around back when I was looking for a way to go, I would have got one.

Great mileage, very reliable.

-Erik (2015)

*  

It's not as elegant, but a box truck has the best shape.

-Erik (2015)

**SCHOOL BUS**

>There is a school bus made into a camper in the parking lot here.

There's one in my RV park.

But with all those windows and no insulation, the thing must be dang cold when it gets down to seventeen degrees.

You can see that the windows are totally iced up. I like a bit more insulation.

Okay, a lot more.

-Erik (2009)
HORSE TRAILERS

I was just looking at some beautiful horse trailers. Very nice.

But did you see how heavy and strong those trailers are? Lots of unnecessary weight, for our mission-purpose.

Horse trailers are also a bit overbuilt and small for the purpose.

If I ever got enough money to move up to a bigger MECU though.... hey, they're pretty neat.

There are some dandy little bare metal-fiberglass trailers that look like they'd work out great. They look pretty good on the outside, which is a consideration in where you can park.

I almost went for this option when I was building mine. But I wanted to go with extreme mobility, so I did the camper thing.

-Erik (2008)

PLASTIC

Some plastics have an absolutely amazingly unexpected way of accumulating badness.

I don't know whether or not fiberglass has this affinity. So I would hate to counsel obtaining a proposed MECU which might have this characteristic.

-Erik (2008)

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I'm still very uncertain as to how well someone in our position can tolerate fiberglass.

How would you ever know if it was affecting you at a low level, maybe not enough to notice, but still enough that you'd be better off with something else?

It'd be good to have some means to know in advance, but I just don't have any track record in that regard.

-Erik (2008)

*
There is a weirdness here, a complication that throws me off.

You see, when driving along, a car builds up a static load like a capacitor.

Remember that electrostatic attractant quality I was speculating about? Sometimes it felt to me like driving through a plume had the effect of concentrating toxins on plastic parts of my MECU, over and above the metal components.

So the fact that the unit is moving plays a part in toxin agglomeration.

Yeah, I know. Crazy! Just like everything else. Can't swear to it, and haven't done deliberate testing of the concept, but it was scary.

And I would hate like hell to tell someone to get a plastic-based MECU and find out later that the whole darn thing turned into a mobile electrostatic ionophore bear trap...as Dr. Shoemaker describes the effect in regards to cholestyramine.

-Erik (2008)

* 

When my last camper went bad and left me stranded in the desert, sleeping in a tent, I wanted a quick way out.

But having been burned so badly, I tried to be cautious.

I checked out a whole bunch of brand new campers, and not only were they obscenely expensive and overpriced, many of them were intolerable to me right from the factory.

Long term prognosis, not good.

There are two brands of RV, Titanium and Prowler, that I feel must be coming from a moldy place of manufacture. They all feel like shit at all the dealerships, no matter where.

Lance campers...some good, some bad.

Fleetwood, all have been good, except that was the brand that eventually went bad on me.

The only thing I can think is that some supplier for certain materials must be bad, but it's not consistent.

I'm out of my realm too. I'm in way over my head.
It's like a miracle that I was crazy or stupid enough to build this MECU thing, and even then, when I take it to certain places at certain times, it has an unbelievable propensity to acquire badness that is almost beyond description.

I believe there is an electrostatic factor of attraction to the equation that people simply do not have enough knowledge of to be able to incorporate this utterly bizarre phenomenon.

It is so difficult to master the places where an MECU can attract the badness that anyone who isn't totally into details would likely have far greater success with a trailer that they can leave in a "feel-good place" and allow their car to be the sacrificial transportation.

One of the guys I know has decided that he wants better mobility than the large Airstream clone he was gutting and is looking into a fiberglass Casita. I'm really impressed at this plan and his choice of trailer.

I might even have been better off if I had gone this route.

- Erik (2008)

* That's what scares the crap out of me about advising anyone on what to buy or build.

I originally insulated my MECU with standard fiberglass insulation so I could get it done quickly.

But the plan from the start was to replace it, to get rid of formaldehyde.

I started having problems in Reno. The MECU was picking up badness in the most incredible and horrific way.

If I didn't bring it into town, or stayed out for weeks, it would die down.

But if I so much as spent two days in Reno, it would literally go to hell.

I replaced all the fiberglass with that Styrofoam, and it made no difference in badness acquisition.

I simply couldn't believe it, but my senses were telling me that the double walled plastic liner that I had on the walls, Coroplast, was the culprit.

"Coroplast" is plastic configured just like cardboard. I figured, "Can't grow mold - must be good."
Turned out, not true.

That plastic doesn't bother me when I'm out in the woods, so it doesn't seem inherently bad, and yet the stuff would turn to killer hell in Reno.

I became convinced that the electrostatic qualities of the plastic, probably in conjunction with the Faraday Box of aluminum construction, was combining to create an attractant well for ionophore toxins.

I removed all the Coroplast. I've been thinking about what I could use to replace it which would lack this electrostatic quality of attraction. I've got some ideas but haven't experimented yet, so I don't know for sure.

In the face of a phenomenon like that, how am I supposed to tell people what to do?

It's going to sound crazy to say, "Plastic is fine as long as you don't take it into a mold zone, in which case plastic can be your worst nightmare. But don't use wood, because it can grow mold."

I've been leaning in the direction of just thinking that this is too complicated for any sufferer to deal with, and that until some researcher decides to go around with me and get a sense of these different factors that I'm dealing with, a mold sufferer would be better served by just finding some means to get out of mold zones and stay out as much as possible.

I heard from the guy looking at the Casita. He still has the Airstream clone and it seems to be working pretty well where it is out in the boonies, all except for when the wind kicks up.

-Erik (2008)

*

One wouldn't think an all-fiberglass box would set up a Faraday effect of electrostatic attraction.

It seems counterintuitive. But I'm not so certain. My experience suggest that this might not be the case.

Under those conditions of atmospheric ion shift we discussed, it would go electrozap crazy.

And then it felt like the camper was trying to kill me. I almost threw the whole thing off a cliff.

I couldn't believe it. All that work. What more could I have done to make it safe?
I repeatedly took the walls out, reinstalled them, changed locations, test after test.

The effect was reproducible.

Plastic x mold zone + ion shift = toxic effect acquisition.

Our conceptual framework is that something is either good or bad. This defies all that in a big way.

This is a huge intellectual challenge, because to predict badness potentiality, one has to balance the affinity of a specific material to attract ionophore toxins (the badness), against where the badness is, and at what times the badness is in effect....and then reduce the material the MECU is made of to accommodate that cumulative combination of complex factors.

So much easier to just stay out in the boondocks.

That's what most PIR 5 (Personal Impact Rating- Extreme) environmentally reactive nutcases are forced to do.

But the attractant effect is manageable, if one knows how to predict it and intercedes in time.

-Erik (2008)

*I have no interior walls and no cosmetic facings at all.

I did once. Plastic. But when my refrigerator went bad, it felt like the plastic soaked up the toxins.

I got rid of the refrigerator and the walls, and have not replaced them with anything.

I keep learning the hard way that plastic is not safe. The stuff is like a super magnet for toxins.

Styrofoam doesn't seem to have the strong electrostatic charge that attracts the toxins. It's as if the harder the plastic, the stronger the affinity.

When you think about it, cholestyramine is little balls of hard plastic.

Its only effect is a super-high electrostatic charge.
Eventually I think I will go with wood facings. Aluminum plate conducts cold too well.

-Erik (2015)

* 

When considering materials for my "mobile environmental control unit," I considered fiberglass.

The variables of the catalytic process, persistent off-gassing and known potential of fiberglass exposure to sensitize people removed it from consideration.

-Erik (2015)

ALUMINUM

We have several aluminum suppliers where I am, but I didn't react to any of it.

Not even the aluminum I got in a flooded area of Sparks, where I feel hits just cruising through.

I felt that while parked in a bad zone, the stuff did stick to metal and just about everything else. But in a good location I have no problem with it at all.

-Erik (2015)

STEALTH

I've seen everything from school buses, to those big UPS type laundry vans, to horse trailers and toy hauler fifth wheels being used by people.

But none of these lend themselves to parking on the street.

Even out here it is getting progressively more unacceptable to park an RV in most places. Moldies have to hide their disability in plain sight, and get no understanding or cooperation. So I lean further and further toward the need for stealth. When you need the dang thing, you really need it.

I like to visit people, but can't always sleep in or in front of their houses.

I have a need to keep my MECU handy, so it had to be something that I can park almost most anywhere. I chose to make it a camper.
If I were to get a Sprinter now, I think that I would do without the windows in the interest of making it look less like someone is sleeping in it.

I have been sorely tempted to get a large van and try to make it look official. I was only half kidding about getting a Sprinter and outfitting it with a satellite dish and a phony "Channel 69 Newsmobile" logo, thinking that they'd probably let me park anywhere.

Like I say. When you're fighting for your life with this problem, people don't understand why you would be doing such a thing as sleeping out on the street in a vehicle when you have a nice warm house available, and they don't cut you any slack.

-Erik (2008)

AUTOMOBILES

>Do you have a sense for the susceptibility of cars to be contaminated? I would think that the circulation of air outside the car would help.

That's what I thought too, until I tried driving at 100 mph to "blow the spores off."

Didn't do a damn thing. I just learned the hard way to make sure that my car isn't parked in a spore plume. One can pay a very high price for making this mistake.

A couple of people have already gone through multiple cars, even stripping out the upholstery. Once a car goes bad, it is very hard to get it good again.

-Erik (2008)

*

Last time I've resorted to car camping was out to the rental car, when on a trip and the hotel was bad.

Kinda sucks to do this for much more than a week, unless it's really warm.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 20

MECU Custom-Built Camper

A MOLDIE’S DREAM

I decided to go all-out on my little experiment and built a special RV out of mold resistant materials, with no wood or paper.

It's been so beneficial that I've just stuck with the RV lifestyle. I never had so much control over my illness until I did this.

-Erik (2005)

* 

After my tent in the desert experience, I decided that I absolutely had to have a domicile that was mold and formaldehyde free, and so constructed my own RV with inert metal and lowest off gassing plastic I could find.
Conventional RV construction is pure mold murder. That’s why I custom built my own rig out of mold-unfriendly materials.

By a weird and completely improbable confluence of events, for a brief moment in time, I had access to a shop where I could build my MECU.

When this opportunity opened up, I remember thinking, "Here is my one chance to start from scratch and do it right" and I jumped on it.

Even now, I look around at all the work I put into my MECU and think, "I must be crazy. Was it really necessary?"

And then I hear more stories and am glad I did it.

Seems to me that Moldies should band together and ask RV manufacturers to construct a totally mold-free RV.

-Erik (2008)

*

I was just looking at my custom built mold resistant RV, thinking how much work I put into staying alive and how hard it was.

Now it all just seems like a bad dream. The custom RV makes it all possible for me.

-Erik (2009)

*

I am writing this from my mold-resistant "Mobile Environmental Control Unit" that I built several years ago.

I am parked next to a house that has intolerable levels of mold.

I can go in and visit, but when the badness starts to get to me, my refuge is waiting.

It's got a wood stove, which is burning right now and keeping me more than comfortably warm, even though it is below freezing outside.

This thing is a "Moldie’s dream," and as far as I'm concerned, it's the only way to fly.

-Erik (2009)

*
Conventional RV construction sucks. That's why I had to build my own. No wood, paper, glue, formaldehyde...nothing! Just steel frame, aluminum siding and Styrofoam insulation.

Injected catalyzed foam is the worst. Mine is mechanically mixed, air-incorporated Styrofoam boards with no catalyst. Not perfect, but the best I could do with what I had.

Erik (2011)

**MY OWN DESIGN**

I decided to go with my own design, which allows the condensation to run down the inside wall and out the bottom without encountering anything that could grow mold.

Well, actually, there's nothing in the camper except metal and plastic, so about the only thing it could possibly find would be accumulations of organic material and dust inside a wall.

I bolted together a basic aluminum frame, used steel studs for a four inch wall, and pop riveted on the exterior aluminum skin. Cost about $4,000 in materials.

Rather than trying to minimize condensation, I built it in such a way that no amount of condensation is a problem. I could wash the inside with a garden hose if I really had to.

Also I built it as a shell with all areas accessible from the interior so that if somehow there was a problem, I could take the wall apart and replace virtually everything but the metal frame and skin.

Just in case something were to happen in the winter, which is the most condensation-intense time.

I really did get tired of getting kicked around by this stuff.

-Erik (2006)

* 

> If your RV is just metal and plastic, does that mean it has no insulation?

It's probably one of the best insulated, warmest RV's around!

Four inches of Styrofoam in the walls, and eight in the floor and roof.

Not only that, but I put a solid titanium wood stove in it.
The whole fireplace weighs eight pounds and keeps me toasty warm in subzero weather. I pick up wood at construction sites, so my heating bill is almost zero.

I pump so much heat through the place that I have the windows and door open in the dead of winter. That really helps keep the condensation down.

I got really tired of having RV's go moldy on me.

-Erik (2006)

*

I built the Mobile Environmental Control Unit as my escape module out of aluminum RV siding, steel studs, and mechanically mixed Styrofoam insulation - with a quarter-inch air gap between the foam and the exterior wall to allow for the unavoidable condensation.

My MECU is very highly insulated, with four inches of Styrofoam in the walls, and six in the ceiling and the floor.

Between all the insulation and the wood stove, this is about the only RV I've ever seen that has the door/vents/windows open when it's snowing like crazy and temperatures are down in the teens.

If one has a need for lots of fresh air, even in the coldest weather, this is the hot ticket.

-Erik (2008)

*

At the inception of the CFS epidemic, I told Dr. Cheney that I had a reactivity to mold that kept getting worse "no matter where I lived." Some places were better, some worse, but the overall effect was that I kept moving further down on the scale.

It just kept getting harder to stay on the good side of the power curve of exposure.

Like so many others, I tried to find a good RV.

I had four of them go bad on me since 1984.

It seemed to me that if things kept going this way, I would have no options left. This scared me about what might happen in the future.

So out of pure desperation, I started from scratch and built my own.
It's not the layout or design so much that matters, just that it must be highly mold resistant and mobile.

I'm completely self-contained.

I obtain my water from a spring up in the mountains, and heat my RV with an interesting wood stove that is made from titanium, so the whole thing only weighs eight pounds, with superior heat dispersal than steel.

Everything is twelve volt.

Portable generator which, amazingly enough, I have to make excuses to run, because I don't need it very often.

I have a "Super Fan" above the shower to extract moisture quickly, but it probably isn't necessary.

The wood stove in my rig puts out so much heat that condensation is a non-issue down to 0 degrees.

The single pane windows don't even ice up.

-Erik (2009)

*

I considered whether to go metal, fiberglass or plastic, and went with metal for this experiment.

Seems to be working well so far.

-Erik (2009)

*

I used steel studs, aluminum angle, Styrofoam insulation and aluminum siding.

-Erik (2015)
A cargo trailer used as an MECU.

Chapter 21

MECU Cargo Trailer Conversion

A BARE TRAILER

A bare panel-van or simple trailer works great as a starter because you can build it from the inside, so areas can be made accessible to take care any future problems.

You can choose whatever size that suits you best.

There are some pretty nice ones that don’t attract a lot of attention.

Just a bare, safe, lockable place that serves as a refuge. Can build it up with the comforts, over time.

When I first put the camper on my truck, there was nothing in it. Just a shell.

No toilet, shower, water, lights...nothing.
Used an electric heater with an extension cord. Cooked on a portable barbecue.

Pissed in a bucket. Washed with a tub. Slept on a backpacking pad.

Compared to how I had been feeling, I was in absolute paradise.

So, if my camper were destroyed and I needed to start over, that would be my best option.

-Erik (2008)

* 

The only critical aspect is mold unfriendliness. Everything else is up to the assembler's discretion, and that leaves an almost infinite number of possibilities.

The doctor I carried out of a moldy place years ago bought a bare metal trailer and just put camping gear inside slowly, one piece at a time. Pretty crude, but it's better than being stuck in mold.

I run into someone else quite frequently out in the boondocks who has a plain white van. There again, it's not exactly the Hilton, but preferable...for him anyway.

It's not so much the design as it is just doing it.

-Erik (2008)

* 

After a great deal of discussion about trying to make the best of an absolutely horrific situation, my Moldie friend made the decision to buy a bare metal and fiberglass toy hauler type trailer as a "Plan B," should the need ever arise again.

She stocked it with basic camping gear, a cot, and an electric heater with a long extension cord.

Rough, but it works, which is the main thing.

We both had too much heartbreak of conventionally built RV's going bad on us.

If I were slammed back into that level of reactivity and lost my MECU, that is precisely what I would do.

What other choice would I have, besides getting out my old semi-reliable tent?

Toy hauler just refers to the ramp-style door on the back.
Hers does have a wood floor, and she’s acting on the basis of, "If it goes bad, I'll rip it up and replace it."

Which is probably how I would go, because I'd want to build a metal floor that has at least six inches of insulation under it.

You just have to find a trailer that suits you.

There’s another reason to start with a bare trailer: so you can build interior "false walls" with an air gap.

The condensation will always be there, but at least with an air gap, it can dry out and the condensation isn't touching much of anything that mold can easily grow on.

That's how I built mine.

-Erik (2010)

CARGO TRAILER CONVERSION

I needed more space for a workshop, so I bought a cargo trailer.

I said to myself that I'm always telling people that this could be a perfect "poor man's MECU," and figured I'd put my own words to the test.

I moved in some camping gear and an electric heater, and within a half hour had a functional escape route.

It's easy. Cheap. Not pretty, but it works.

The guy I bought it from was using a Nissan Pathfinder to tow it, so I assume any car in that range can tow it too.

It cost $3,500.

As a small cargo trailer, this is pretty low-key, and I think it would hide on the streets about as well as an RV.

Every year it gets harder to find good places, as things get more crowded, rules become stricter, and more free campsites get barricaded.
I’m not proposing this as a convenient way of life or that everyone should move into a cargo trailer. This just opens up more options.

-Erik (2010)

*

I keep my cargo trailer as pristine as possible, more so than my rig. It’s kind of my "plan C." When I drag contamination into my rig, I jump over to the cargo trailer.

This is not unlike the isolation zone techniques we practiced in the Army.

I just checked out the local papers and when I saw something in the size range I wanted for a decent price, I jumped on it.

Then I set up a cot and a heater, and sat and looked and pondered what I would have to do to make this a tad more comfortable.

Amazing how ideas just spring to mind, starting with lots and lots of insulation.

I've got the best insulated cargo trailer I've ever seen now. One small electric heater keeps it warm.

I'm going to install my own windows later.

-Erik (2010)

*

I'm working on my new improved MECU.

This thing has insulation up the wazoo, much more room, and incorporates more of the tricks I've learned than my last one.

I have a Pace. The doors are still currently wood but they aren't bad at this point.

It had no insulation, which is the way I wanted it, so I could install the low VOC mechanically mixed Styrofoam. This summer I plan to rebuild the doors with four inches of insulation.

Last winter it was so warm that a small electric heater was more than enough, but I want to make this thing safe for Idaho-Wyoming winters.

-Erik (2011)

*
I love my custom trailer. Daunting project, but totally worth the effort.

Mine is sixteen feet, but they can be any size. The only limit is one’s imagination and the size of their tow vehicle.

One can build an MECU any way they please, with as many or as few windows as they see fit. Condensation levels do not matter if the construction is mold resistant.

-Erik (2011)

* 

When I had a problem in my custom RV going bad (the refrigerator), I needed a Plan B, fast.

I got a cargo trailer locally for $3,500. Stripped out the wood and got relief within hours.

I thought what a shame it is for people to suffer so long and so much when there is an alternative available.

Not pretty, but effective.

There is a RV trailer called Balboa that are just converted cargo trailers.

I have not been in them.

But I figure their existence makes it harder for RV parks to complain about cargo trailers.

-Erik (2015)

THE FAVORABLE CHOICE

I really feel that despite the obvious drawbacks, the pristine qualities of a plain cargo trailer makes it the favorable choice.

The skills required to add the accoutrements of comfort are not hard to come by.

It is kind of fun throwing these things together.

-Erik (2011)

*
The way things are progressing, this is nuts. People are just becoming insanely reactive to stuff. No telling how far it goes.

Part of the problem is to talk philosophy on how this is done. It's like buying an airplane. You also need to learn how to fly it.

Probably the best thing would be to build one on spec and see how it works out for people. To make one and have people try it out.

Part of trying it out is seeing how the systems work. I have some very strange ideas, and they don't sit quite right with folks. You have to see why I do what I do.

My concept is to start with a basic shell that is nothing but polystyrene insulation and steel studs. That's it. Everything else is an option.

Some people react to the insulation on wires, so they are an option.

The flow of electrons - dirty electricity - sets up an electrochemical reaction that releases substances from the plastic wrapping on electrical wires that some people cannot tolerate.

One can use light boxes on the roof so that ambient daylight and electric light shine in through windows, so the wires are not inside.

The beauty of the starter bare module is that if one has no problem with wires, they don't have to go to extremes. You make it however you need it.

With a modular template, one can go with an "I need it right now" layout, and keep adding components over time.

The reason I built my camper is that at the time, I couldn't tolerate any manufactured ones. I have learned a few hard lessons over the years.

This wouldn't be the most beautiful rig in the world, but I figured out ways to throw the basics together for really cheap.

For those who get their butts kicked in a normal rig, this would probably look like heaven.

If an MECU is mishandled, it could be carved from pure titanium and it would still go bad. The construction I envision only maximizes your chances, but it is not a guarantee.

This life is a real pain. I think that the only way to get around that is to have a basic shell with nothing in it. Everything that comes in is modular and can be quickly removed.

People would try sleeping in the shell and then start bringing in components.
My trailer is basically a modular plan. When the refrigerator went bad in my camper, I was unable to easily take it out. Everything in my trailer can come right out again.

I think it needs to be metal. Even cured fiberglass will off-gas on a hot day.

I'm getting really suspicious of plastic. Plastic seems to attract this crap.

If people can't tolerate sheet metal and polystyrene, there isn't a single RV anywhere that they could tolerate.

It needs to have a shower. If I had no shower, I would be dependent on taking showers elsewhere. That defeats the point of having an MECU at all.

If I weren't practicing perceptification and dropping my clothes outside the door and decontaminating, I would have this place totally intolerable in no time.

Out in the desert, keeping the place good would be easy. But here, it's a real challenge.

My trailer is sixteen by eight feet. Shower, kitchenette, refrigerator, heater, bed and shelving.

But here is where it gets weird. I have been hurt really bad by RV holding tanks. I don't trust them anymore.

I would not have tanks. I would have a large marine porta potty for urine, with a plastic bag system for fecal matter.

I agree that a conventional plumbing system is more desirable for a conventional person, but we're talking survival here. Tanks are such a risk that I don't even want to deal with them anymore.

My shower has a drain through the floor. I slide a large catch bucket underneath.

One could go with a tank system that is easily removable. That would be a bit more costly, but it could be easily done. It's just something I don't want for myself.

There's another weird thing I do. I don't have a freshwater tank. I have a large metal cooling pot that has a pump tube in it, and my water storage is a bunch of one gallon glass bottles.

I don't have a water heater either. Since I boil all water anyway, it is almost always part of the plan to have hot water going already.

I have kitchen sink, water pump, shower. Everything is normal up to that point. But instead of having drain pipes, the grey water goes into a bucket or a trough.
I’ve taken three showers so far today. It’s really not a problem.

I was going to put my water heater back in, until I had practice with this system and realized that I not only don’t need it, I don’t even like it. This works better.

But I suppose most people would rebel at doing it this way.

Catch 22. If you don't, might not get well. This is such a strange new way to live, it's almost too much to even talk about it.

But a pulse of badness came through the water supply a couple of years ago. Damn near took me out. I can't afford to have that happen again.

Boiling all water before using it has really done an incredible job. As a result of this madness, I am having the best Suicide Season that I can ever remember.

The water is usually okay here, but when that "whatever" goes through, it can make my life absolute hell if I don't head it off. Since I have no way of knowing when it is going to happen, I'm pretty much stuck with treating my water this way at all times.

Nobody would drop their clothes at the door and shower on a consistent basis until they see what it can do. Boiling water is the same.

The thing is, you don't know if your tanks are messing you up until you try out having them gone.

Sometimes you do these crazy things, and it isn't until then that you realize that it does make a difference.

It is really marvelous to be able to keep everything the same and only change one variable, like having a modular tank that you can remove. Then you really know.

The porta potty only gets flushed with boiled water.

My old system was not exactly modular, but with some difficulty, I could take it out and then put it back in. I did so a number of times. What it taught me is that I never want to have another holding tank anywhere near me.

I just can't take having tanks go bad on me again. It starts out slow, and eats you up so gradually that it's like the lobster in the pot concept.

The point is that when they do go bad, they creep up on you. One day you realize that you were losing ground, and start looking around to find out what it is.

With a super easy removable tank, it would probably be okay.
But the point of having a conventional system is to hook it up to the RV park sewer. And guess what they usually have growing in them? When you dump or stay hooked up, you're probably flooding the inside of the tank with spores.

I thought that by doing it this way, I am never hooking up to a system that has the potential to send something back into to a tank.

Still, I know how to do a tank system that would be so easily removable that you could check it in a few minutes if you were suspicious. That might be an option.

You could make a sewer drain that had a gap, funnel, I suppose. But you see my point. With a solid hose, as stuff rushes out, air rushes back in.

I've been working on a "What if it keeps getting worse" scenario.

How do I maximize my systems for more terrible problems that would crop up, if this trend continues?

Total isolation from water and sewer would seem prudent.

I have had some experiences within the last couple of year where something comes out of the sewers, so fast, so bad, that it doesn't give you a chance. This stuff is horrible beyond description.

You hit this stuff and you have minutes to do something about it, if that. You get it on your clothing, and in minutes you will want to rip it off.

It gets on your shoes, and you shoes will kill you. It goes with you. I had burn marks on my ankles from it.

I said, "That's enough." I can live without holding tanks.

-Erik (2012)

**PLUMBING**

Cargo trailers have no water system, except whatever one builds in.

Mine is specialized according to my needs. Instead of a water tank, my pump draws from a large stainless steel pot which is filled with water that has just been boiled.

The water coming down from a "bad zone" is sufficiently tainted that I can feel pulses of it in the water supply.
I find that when I boil water, it releases a cloud of "it" at a point under boiling temp. I have all vents, doors and windows open to allow this "it" to dissipate freely.

Without this tactic, I would really be hating life.

-Erik (2011)

I take military showers, so it’s only two or three gallons maximum.

I have a big eight-gallon tamale pot as reservoir. I adjust the water temperature by adding hot water until I like it. A tube goes from the pot to the pump so that all I have to do is turn on the faucet. All automatic.

There is no difference at all in functionality from a regular shower, except that since I’ve already got the water the way I like it, there’s no need to adjust the temperature.

I changed my shower to a direct drain system. Water runs through the drain and drops into a bucket suspended under the camper, in a storage compartment.

After the shower, I lower the bucket (it's on a sling) and toss it somewhere. Either on the ground, which is usually okay for gray water, or down the sewer drain.

I'm changing over to a metal shower pan that will have no sealant. I'll use a drip mat for a floor pad.

I use a regular RV pump. Any of them will do. It's the same sprayer and upper part of the stall that I used before, but everything else was cut out.

At first, instead of having the drain go through a pipe, I tried it out with a trough. But I decided that I didn't need either.

I can just route the water right through the drain pan straight down into the bucket. No pipe, no trough. Makes it simple.

I just slide a bucket under the trailer. There are wheeled systems available.

Usually I have water boiling already, so I just use that for showers. But if I don’t have any water boiling and want to take a shower, then I just put a gallon on the stove and use that to adjust the temperature.

To keep the water from spilling when the camper is moving, I have the water level less than half full, clamp the lid down and don’t drive like a maniac.

This alternative system is about the same amount of effort to build as putting in tanks.
It wasn’t fun having my rig go bad on me in the middle of winter. I don’t want to go through that again. You have to figure out how to prevent that, or you’re back in the same fix.

There are sump pumps so you can drain tanks using a garden hose. That would be another way to do it without physically hooking up the sewer drain pipe.

Perhaps if the holding tanks were stainless steel, they might not go bad. I don’t know.

I got rid of my tanks, and then the pipes were still making me sick with no tanks.

So I got rid of the pipes. Things got much better. Then I would put in new ones, and sometimes within days, I could feel things going right back to where they were.

I tried at least a dozen rebuilds -- replacing with new, using only boiled water, and then with several different materials.

This is the one that I liked best.

-Erik (2012)

*  

The new MECU is just metal siding, steel - aluminum framework, and Styrofoam. I was thinking of trying to find some suitable untreated wood to panel it with, so Kitty can’t claw the Styrofoam walls apart.

I really don't have a condensation problem. Not with that wood stove throwing out a zillion watts of BTU power.

The good thing about modular construction is that by taking everything out, you can reassure yourself that it wasn’t the rig that went bad.

Everything that has beaten the hell out of me in the last couple of years tells me that plumbing is the gravest threat.

The point of the MECU is to interface with bad places. Any house in the desert can stay good, if it is never subjected to contamination.

Cargo trailers usually have regular one inch plywood on the floor. A bit of water shouldn’t hurt it. I cut mine six inches shy of the walls so that if it were to become a problem, I can just pull up whatever section I want out and toss it.

Any medium sized SUV or comparable horsepower should be able to pull a sixteen foot trailer.
The Styrofoam insulation has seemed okay. Not all plastics seem equal in soaking these toxins up.

-Erik (2012)

*

I had both gray and black water tanks go bad.

So I removed the tanks and run my shower into ten-gallon bucket that I slide under my RV.

I have a shower. That is what the ten-gallon bucket is for.

I do have to remember to empty it. Especially in freezing weather.

I just pour soapy water down the sewer drains.

Sometimes I'll just rinse with water alone, which I dump on the grass.

-Erik (2015)

FLOORING

I tore up my aluminum floor and replaced it with a removable wooden runner. Raised with ventilation underneath and removable for any emergency.

Aluminum conducts cold far too well.

I had a fear of wood. It is abating now that I am getting some trust back in materials which could get moldy, but aren't.

-Erik (2015)

INSULATION

>That Styrofoam you use, is it the kind (1" - 1.5" thick) with the blue writing on the front and thermal backing on the back, or did you source it without any coatings/films on the surfaces? I'm thinking of the stuff they normally put on exterior walls inside the wall as they build out the frames and plywood in house construction.

Yes. That's the stuff. Cut to fit in corners.
R-Tech 2 in. x 4 ft. x 8 ft. R-7.7 Rigid Foam Insulation-310891.

Got it at Home Depot.

I used one-inch aluminum architectural angle as a frame to secure four-inch-thick Styrofoam to the walls. Light but strong.

Condensation is not a problem. Nothing for mold to grow on.

I agree on canvas insulation being too risky.

Spray-in foam uses catalyst. The stuff outgasses and is pure murder.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 22

Outdoor Mold

TOXIC IS TOXIC

"Safe outdoor molds"? Why would a mold spore that was dangerous to your lungs indoors suddenly turn safe if it happens to drift outside?

As far as I can tell, your lungs don't care if the mold you inhale has walls around you or not.

-Erik (2006)

Toxic is toxic. Indoors or out.
I was really fortunate that my mold experience started so long ago that I wasn’t misled by people who portray it as an indoor problem.

You can't escape by just going outside.

-Erik (2008)

*

I was tent camping when I drove through Moab. The plume was in the center of town.

I stopped to get some ice and realized I was parked in a pretty bad zone. I jumped back in the car, but it was too late. The car felt like crap for about a day or so afterwards.

I had to drive with the windows open and spend more time out of the car. I was knocked out for about twelve hours afterwards.

Contamination happens just this easily.

That’s what makes this a real challenge. I pretty much have to stay out of plumes and avoid contact with anything that was in a bad zone, even if it is carried into my presence by someone else.

This is very much like thermalling in a hang glider: constantly steering out of the sink (cold downdrafts) and trying to locate good air that is going up - all by your perception of which way things are going.

The better you do it, the more altitude you gain.

Blunder into the sink and down you go.

-Erik (2008)

**PLUMES AND CLOUDS**

The concept of a "plume" is to separate it from a "spore cloud."

A mold colony in still air will have a spore cloud around it. The radius of the affected area around the source would depend upon the hang time of an airborne spore based upon its size and water weight (and a few other ambient factors of humidity and barometric pressure).

Theoretically, if there were no wind around a mold colony, the hang time of the spores would dictate their radius of destruction.
Until the cloud is deflected by airflow: a plume.

A plume is just a spore cloud deflected by the wind. But the spores have to come from the colony, so no matter which way the wind blows, if you point upwind, you'll be pointing at the source... the colony.

If the wind is blowing, you could conceivably stand directly upwind of a mold colony and be unaffected. Conversely, the area downwind of the normal affected radius is dramatically extended to great distances. So a cloud is what one would expect around the sourcepoint, while the plume is the extension of that zone by airflow.

I felt a plume crossing the highway as I drove through Monterey. I'm pretty sure that it wasn't a spore cloud because it isn't always there, and it was windy. I didn't stop to try to locate the source.

Staying out of sick buildings is relatively straightforward, but watching out for the plumes they emit is another matter entirely.

-Erik (2008)

*

Plumes are all over the place and constantly move according to wind, humidity, weather change and physical disturbance of colonies. They are not fixed in place except at the source, often a bad building or sewer system.

That's why I say my hang-gliding background was useful. Extreme avoidance is exactly like soaring. You're searching for invisible thermals and working them for maximum altitude...or you fall out of the sky as quickly as possible when you're tired of flying and want to get down fast.

You have to go it by feel.

-Erik (2008)

MOLD ZONES

As for getting hit from a mold plume from somewhere you can't control...no choice but to move.

-Erik (2006)

*
I refer to mold zones are ambient areas that have been repeatedly plumed. Any house within a mold zone is a bad house for me, since one cannot really stop whatever is outside from coming inside.

-Erik (2008)

I went nuts trying to remediate a house that wasn't really the source of the problem. I spent thousands.

We found a small colony in the house. Getting rid of it did nothing.

Then I started going to the woods to get clear, then back to the property without going inside, and I still got slammed.

I checked the wind direction, and it was coming from the sewer. "No house involved."

It finally sunk in that nothing I did inside the house was ever going to make that area safe for me.

I could have burned the house to the ground and built another and it wouldn't have made any difference in my illness.

-Erik (2008)

CONTAMINATION ZONE

Of course there is a contamination zone around every sick building.

Remember how I drove right past Truckee High School and parked upwind on the opposite side of the street, so we could gradually approach it from an area that is more favorable, due to the prevailing wind direction? Because that gave us the least amount of distance to go in the contamination zone?

There was a huge parking lot right in front of the school, easy to pull in, with lots of places to park. But it was downwind of the old bus sheds.

-Erik (2008)
YOUR NEIGHBOR’S PLUME

I checked out a business where a number of people are in various stages of mold illness. The friend who brought me there is the most affected. At times I got hits from my friend’s clothes that were so strong that I expected to find a horribly contaminated environment.

To my surprise, the building was not very bad. That is to say, it wasn't bad until the spore plume from the neighboring house blew directly toward it. Then the whole area became living hell.

A few months ago, the new owners of the house clearly did their own mold remediation. There were bits of kitchen counters and piles of sheetrock laying in the yard. Since that time the mold problem has become so much worse in that spore plume that I cannot stand next to my friend’s car after it's been plumed. My friend has gone hyperreactive and is looking for another job.

This is clearly going to be a contentious issue, to be driven out of your house or job by your neighbor’s mold. I have found entire sections of towns that I cannot bear.

-Erik (2002)

*

I moved into a place that had no mold inside at all. I went nuts trying to find it inside until I realized that I was getting hit outside, especially when the wind was from the southwest.

I wound up sleeping outside and upwind of the house in various wind directions until I could get a vector on the location of the colony. There was nothing I could do about it except try to be somewhere else when the wind blew from that direction.

I've found enough places drenched in spore plumes from somewhere else to know that if you are extraordinarily sensitive, even the most rigorous testing is no guarantee the place will be survivable.

The only way to get a sense if any potential dwelling will be safe for you is to sleep there while it undergoes different wind directions and weather conditions.

-Erik (2002)

*
If your neighbor has a sick building and decides to install a central vacuum and blast the spores outside and your window is adjacent to their vacuum exhaust, your neighbor’s spores are now your spores.

-Erik (2005)

**AIR MOVEMENT**

> Historically, scientists believed that several days of ultraviolet light exposure would kill off any microbes traveling in dust clouds. Yet when Griffin and his colleagues screened air in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, they found viable airborne microbe populations.

No wonder we are seeing mold growing in places it never grew before.

-Erik (2006)

* >Everything in my tent suddenly feels bad. I don’t know what happened.

I went out to the Godforsaken Desert and found that this did not happen ever.

But when I went to other places that appeared to be barren GFD, but were downwind of metropollution areas and civildevastation, it did.

So, my definition of a successful shift in location is to find a place where this never happens, regardless of whether the spot really is in the GFD or is downtown Reno, where I happen to be right now.

Strangely enough, a plume is sailing right past me down to the south. So this is good enough and I’m fairly safe.

Barring a change in wind direction.

The operative concept is whether or not the effect occurs and not really whether it has trees or no trees, or even has buildings.

-Erik (2009)

* > These winds would let you know where smog from a city piles up against the mountains.
The lifting of the air mass causes a lot of the acids to nucleate and precipitate right on top of the "pristine" forest on the tops of mountains.

But places downwind of mountains tend to be more clear of toxins.

-Erik (2009)

A SICK THERMAL

I was hang gliding over Mt. Hull in northern California when I spotted an area where a forest fire had burned away all the greenery. Places like this are just honking for thermals, so I flew over to check it out. Sure enough I hit a 3,000 fpm vertical elevator, but within a couple of turns, I got so sick I had to bail out.

It was seven long miles to the landing area and I flew the whole way with my head laying on the control bar. I thought I was going to pass out and never wake up before ground impact.

I had just enough strength to do a landing approach and flare. I crawled out and leaned against a log for hours afterward wondering what the hell had happened to me.

I didn’t know then, but I do now. That sensation has become quite familiar to me.

-Erik (2004)

*

I was hang gliding over mountains where a forest fire had been put out by aerial drops of flame retardant and got slammed by that same sense I had in bad buildings.

I thought I was going to pass out.

The closest landing area was seven miles away.

I lay my head on the control bar and was jerked awake several times as the glider started to fall into a turn.

I barely had enough strength to pull off a landing.

But I know that I wasn't reactive to the flame retardant, and forest mold never did this to me.
That is when I put the two together and thought that there can be really bad places out in nature.

It all depends on whether the mold had access to chemicals.

-Erik (2015)

**SICK REGION SYNDROME**

There are virtual sick regions which are unsuitable for people like us.

The people who conduct the testing have a mindset of sick buildings only. It is rare to find someone who understands that if your reactivity transcends that type of exposure, finding little mold only serves to convince one that it is not the problem.

We are pretty much left to ourselves to explore this strange new mold paradigm.

-Erik (2008)

*

The swiftness with which this mold paradigm has gone from "not possible" to "everyone knows about that" suggests it is progressing at an extremely rapid pace.

I extrapolated the inevitable creation of sick regions, if this keeps going on as it has.

Who knows? Maybe we are already there.

-Erik (2008)

**A DOWNTOWN SHOPPING MALL**

If you had tested any of a few thousand buildings downwind of the Park Lane Mall when they dozed it, they would all have qualified as sick buildings.

I was wondering what would happen when the mall was demolished. Would it make this area of Reno permanently worse, or would the removal of that nasty place get me a net gain?
It took a while for the demolition effects to die down, but the place is better for me than it was.

- Erik (2008)

**CARRYING THE RESPONSE**

Remember how I described parking across the street from that apartment complex because it was lateral to the prevailing winds and allowed us to enter the zone from the side, which allows for a quick escape?

If I don't carry the response with me after leaving a zone like that, I don't necessarily have to decontaminate right away...so I don't.

However, if I get out of a place like that and feel that my clothes are contaminated, that's another matter.

- Erik (2009)

**SHIFTING BY YARDS**

Just yesterday, I was hit by a wayward mold plume and felt the change in skin perfusion and "static zaps."

I know by years of experience that there is only so much of this that I can take before it hits a critical threshold. So I bailed out. Ran for my life.

I've never found anything that holds a candle to the ability to just get out of that situation.

Sometimes I only have to move a few hundred feet.

It's like dancing around cigarette smoke by dodging and ducking at the first hint of smelling the wafting threads of a drifting fume. Only, in this case, it's a mild burning sensation, slight brain compression and sudden change in the zap factor.

- Erik (2008)

*

It is definitely worth my while to move short distances around Reno, according to wind direction and how certain places are acting up.
The super bad mold seems to be very localized at the moment. That is the main stuff that calls for immediate relocation.

It is amazing to me how much better the area around the Park Lane Mall location is, now that they finished demolishing the last of the foundation and hauled every last bit of it away.

I knew it was the center of badness for that particular part of town, but I had no idea how much it would improve the area just to have that one sourcemap disappear.

Reminds me very much of hang gliding.

This is how one works thermals. Gravitate toward the up, and speed up to get out of the down.

Over time, how well you do this dictates whether it was a good flight or not.

-Erik (2009)

* 

I keep telling people that I shift locations by yards, and for some reason, the debate changes to shifting countries or continents.

I have been to different continents and while there, I still had to shift locations...by yards.

-Erik (2009)

* 

I showed you how to approach Truckee High School by driving to a point upwind, parking... and then slowly entering the plume at its narrowest aspect (so we could turn and run if need be). Then I did the same thing at Henness Flats.

I thought that made it very clear that there were disastrous plumes rolling through Truckee.

-Erik (2010)
Chapter 23

Super Toxins

TACTICS

I used to be so scared of the supermold that I remember, after a really bad slam, taking a shower and standing in the middle of a room... too scared to move.

Too scared to put my clothes on, too scared to lie down, touch anything.

I just stood there and cried. I had no idea how I was going to stay alive with a problem like this.

I can't believe it, but you saw how cavalier I can be about decontaminating.
It took years of practice, but somehow I just developed a sense that allows me to feel my way around.

As long as I act in accordance with that sense, and exert additional effort when I start to fall lower on the power curve, I am amazed at how well I do in places that used to scare me to death.

I think that after a few months in your MECU, you will move higher on the power curve and feel much more in control about venturing into the bad places.

Scary, but not quite as scary, and as time goes along, a certain confidence builds up, based on experience.

-Erik (2009)

* 

Just a few minutes ago, I returned from doing errands and carried my knapsack, which I know to have been in bad places, into my rig.

The store I shop at is okay, and the knapsack was only moderately hit.

The knapsack doesn’t seem to be a problem for the things I put in it, but I do keep it outside without washing, because I am going back into some bad places again and the effort would outweigh the benefit.

I must be getting careless, because I set it inside by the door while I was unloading its contents and left it there while I put them away.

Sure enough, in the enclosed space, the thing started acting up and I tossed it back outside, with instant relief.

In the Army, I would have been disciplined for this breach of protocol.

The isolation area should be established outside at a good distance, but what the heck? You get to a point where if controlling it has been fairly easy, you begin to cut corners.

This is all just for normal bad mold though.

The really bad stuff, of course I just run and decontaminate.

Bag my clothes and store them on the roof, figure out what to do with them later.
Lately though, I haven't hit the really bad stuff.

-Erik (2010)

*

>How have you managed not to hit the really bad stuff?

I turn and run, that's what I do.

I was in a shopping center on the north end of Reno that has consistently felt good to me, and I got too close to some shoppers that had the killer stuff on them. I did a quick 180 and escaped.

That stuff is so bad, I wonder how they stay alive?

Lately, I have only gone to usual places, but there is a shopping center on the south side of Reno that really knocked me flat a few years ago.

In the next couple of days I intend to go check it out, to see if it still has the same effect.

-Erik (2010)

*

If a computer is just contaminated with the normal bad stuff, like mine was, I could take it in and out of a room and it would not cross contaminate. Just make the room unbearable.

But if it is the really bad stuff, it can make a room uninhabitable for longer than I cared to stick around to find out how long it lasts.

-Erik (2010)

*

The regular bad stuff seems to die down on its own in a couple of days.

The superbad stuff is murder on possessions, but if I can detect and avoid in time, I haven't had much of a problem with having to throw things away.

-Erik (2010)

*
What do you do when your truck is drenched from the killer plume in Truckee?

I spray it down, but have to deal with it for a while. Seems to last about two days.

-Erik (2011)

*

There is a warning.

But it is so subtle and seemingly minor that people just go, "Oh, that? It's no big deal, just 'tough it out' and forget about it."

-Erik (2011)

*

After finding the curative power of beach in 1986, observing the same effect in "desert" in 1987, it seemed to me that if I could isolate and identify what moved into Lake Tahoe during the "mystery illness’ outbreak and learn to detect and avoid it, I would not have to go great distances hoping to evade it.

This turned out to be the case.

I can be just a few yards away from a plume and be perfectly fine.

I just can't be in it.

-Erik (2015)

**MYSTERY TOXIN**

Some buildings have, mixed in with normal bad mold, a few hot spots of the real bad stuff.

People can be just a few feet away, and if they don't pass through, they remain oblivious and unbelieving.

Those who encounter it can drop in their tracks, while the person a few steps away from them wonders what the hell they are complaining about.

-Erik (2009)

*
I’ve not found the mystery toxin indoors very often.

Agreed. Seems to be more outside than in.

When it is inside, it always seems to be coming up from underneath. Below foundations, from sewers, or the dankest depths of the darkest basement.

The bad stuff in the walls is just a pale imitation of the crap that lurks beneath.

-Erik (2010)

*

I’ve taken people up to the hot springs lodge, and they were getting heart palpitations there, like I was.

Yet, there are weird differences in how this effect manifests from different sources at various times.

Same place - some days it's more heart palps and brain compression, while at others, seems to have more of a chemical feeling.

So difficult to describe, and so variable, that it's almost not worth it to try.

More like, "Just get a tent and see for yourself.”

-Erik (2009)

*

There are complexities to this weirdness. This is why we need some real research.

I ran into a plume the other day and didn’t have my HEPA system on, so the interior took a pretty good hit. Here’s the deal.

As I lay on my cot, the heart palps would start in on me. But as I stood, the upper air in my rig had more of a burning sensation without palps. Similar to what we felt at Truckee High School.

When I opened up all my vents, I could feel the burning presence zip right on out. Of course, I still couldn't use my cot until I replaced the contaminated blankets.

Then I went out to the campground at Boca and let the thing die down. Seems to take about a day to get back to feeling okay again.
My personal purely speculative notion is that different toxins emanate from the spores in sequential order. And the floaty toxins went up, while the spores stayed down.

Definitely some molds are better floaters, though. Stachy is the prize sinker with a hang time of less than an hour for fully hydrated spores.

-Erik (2008)

*

That's how the plume is, in between Truckee and Squaw Valley. Sometimes it's "needle in the chest" and sometimes I can't even feel it.

It feels like a slender needle going up into the bottom of my heart. Sometimes it does seem more like the sternum. Never could figure that out.

It looks to me like mold "acting up" is a hit-and-run deal, where mold waits for the next time something rolls through that it can turn into a supertoxin.

The stuff comes and goes, and each time, is forgotten and not remembered that this has happened before. Unless you were one of the people it happened to.

-Erik (2011)

*

That super toxin is a real standout.

One pass through it can create contamination on an object that goes beyond any sick building you ever felt.

-Erik (2015)

*

I believe toxins in the water are the driving force behind the power of mold in Mountain View.

-Erik (2015)

HORROR PLUMES

>Was everyone who got sick in the Incline epidemic living or working in a moldy building?
Every single one that I could verify. But it looked like the plume was bad enough that some could be immune suppressed just by walking through, and this might have left them wide open to whatever bug the Yuppie flu was.

But living in a moldy place didn’t seem to be nearly as critical as encountering a horror plume at a bad time, such as when you have an infection.

One pass through a horror plume and nobody quite recovers, even if they don’t go on to be totally sick.

-Erik (2011)

*

My mother is the most invulnerable person I know.

She’s been in some of the worst buildings I ever felt, and is totally unfazed.

But I took her to the Incline Village plume and it knocked her on her butt for 24 hours.

She was amazed. She had been certain it wouldn’t touch her.

-Erik (2015)

FIRE RETARDANT TOXIN

There is a killer compost farm located right next to the air tanker base south of Carson City.

Some of the fiercest mold I found around that tanker base was in decomposing weeds in a drainage ditch leading away from the retardant loading station.

I wondered if my reaction was to the chemicals themselves, so to check, I wandered around the base and made certain to inhale fuel fumes and step in piles of spilled retardant. No reaction.

But that drainage ditch was pure murder.

-Erik (2009)

*
In 1984, I was Hang Gliding near Mt. Hull in northern California, and - in search of strong thermals - flew over an area that had been deforested by wildfire.

I found my monster thermal, a real boomer, but almost immediately was struck by a horrific sense of toxic poisoning.

Immediately I tried to get away, but I was so sick that I could hardly keep my eyes open.

I laid my head on the control bar and made for the landing area, seven miles away, afraid I was going to pass out. I kept opening my eyes with a start as the glider (which are deliberately built to be unstable for handling purposes) would begin to fall off on a wing in the prelude to a side-slipping spiral dive.

I barely had enough strength to plan my final approach and landing flare when I finally made it to the landing area.

What had made me so sick...there, of all places, thousands of feet above a burned out forest?

I asked around and found that this forest fire was too remote to be fought with ground equipment, and had been almost solely contained by using airborne drops of flame retardant.

I'm just trying to find out what the heck happened to us.

I figured there was no need for me to have to wonder about the possibility that I was reacting to that stuff, since it is so easy to check for myself.

I went out to the air tanker base at the Douglas City airport and wandered around the fire-retardant fueling platform where the stuff had spilled all over the tarmac.

I didn’t feel a thing. No problem at all.

But when I wandered past a swampy drainage ditch...POW! There it was. Same "Yechhh."

So, let’s see. The substance itself doesn't bug me, but down in the muck from that ditch, it does?

It sure looks to me like some microbial presence is processing the chemicals into powerful neurotoxins that are slamming me.

Looks like mold. Think I'll stay away from it.

-Erik (2010)
WHITE FUZZ

I built my Mobile Environmental Control Unit within range of the plume from the compost farm, trusting that it was of materials that were sufficiently resistant to not be problematic after I finished and got out of there.

I could not have been more wrong.

The aluminum and plastic Econolite signboard that I used in the roof and overhang of the camper began developing spot zones that were increasingly troublesome, with the same sensation of pure unmitigated impending death that I was getting from the compost farm.

This wasn't cross contamination, this time.

There was some whitish fuzzy crap growing on the plastic.

Incredibly small areas, but absolutely fierce stuff. It was pure chemical burn.

No idea what it was and didn't care to keep a sample. It was just plain horrible and I had no place to stash a sample. Once I uncovered the stuff, it was nailing me at a good twenty feet.

Unfortunately, I had incorporated this composite plastic/aluminum material into support structure, making it extremely difficult to remove.

My summer was spent stripping my MECU right back down to the bare metal frame and rebuilding these structural components of different materials.

People may recall that my advice changed accordingly. I began warning against trusting plastic, and said that the basic shell should be of only metal and nothing else.

The stuff that got into plastic components of my MECU is as bad as anything I have ever encountered in the past.

Removal has been extremely unpleasant and the after effects of the surrounding contaminated area have been equal to the spot that was removed, although more diffuse and gradually dying down.

It's hard to know what to advise people when they reject the notion of using a bare metal trailer as a survival module starter unit as too difficult, since it might well be that nothing less even has the potential to avoid this horrible "stuff."

-Erik (2010)
HELL TOXIN

There is something out there that is so much worse than the usual "ick" that trying to deal with it is just off the charts. It's not easy to talk about.

Normal efforts at decontamination don't seem to apply to this amazing substance. This stuff just has to stay out.

If someone is not willing to play by the rules if something like the supertoxic bad stuff shows up, they are capable of innocently inflicting great damage on another Moldie.

If someone shows up with this horrible "Agent X," don't let it get in your washing machine. I haven't found any way to get it out, short of a flamethrower.

-Erik (2010)

*

The really horrible stuff back in 1994 wasn't in my house. There was a little bit in the neighborhood. I think it was from the sewer.

It got on my cat, and my cat nearly killed me by jumping up in my lap. I wound up in the ER.

-Erik (2010)

*

I got put down so hard by my rig going bad a couple of years ago that I lost control of my options. I was trapped.

I wound up sleeping on the roof.

I just went crazy with this thing. Unreal. It tore me up so bad that I thought I was a goner.

It wasn't until last year that I finally started to get some answers and pull out of it.

I totally gutted my rig. Ripped it to pieces. Took the siding off, all insulation, all plumbing, wiring, right back to the frame.

I took the roof completely off. The framework was killing me. Like the metal itself was assimilating the toxin.

It was this experience that helped confirm to me that the "substance" had properties like radiation.
The Army told us that this is how "soft radiation" acts.

This toxin is very sticky. I’ve had to really watch it with my shoes.

It knocked me right up against a wall to have my rig go bad. I thought this is just about the last straw.

If I can put so much work into making a safe zone, and lose it, what hope do I have?

Having my refrigerator go bad was only part of my problem last year. The rest was that the contaminated surfaces then became a suitable locus for acquisition of more toxicity.

That’s what I learned in this latest round of getting slammed. The bigger the locus, the more attractant power it has.

Remember Branislav talking about putting a credit card on a table, and having the "effect" increase? Or his story about how the toxin started in one faucet, but jumped to another?

I told him this didn't make sense to me as it was unlikely that the toxins would move that way.

Well, it’s here, and that is exactly how it works. It's like a locus of contamination attracts more.

That is a property of nanoparticles. Breaking free of it is really hard.

If a locus of contamination grows worse, it is attracting more, right out of the air.

That gives two options. Remove the locus, or move to a place where the ambient levels are less.

-Erik (2010)

*

I had a visitor with stuff of that quality on him. I literally had to pick up the chair he sat in and run for the door.

It is absolutely murderously difficult to break free of that garbage.

That's why I shifted over to cargo trailer MECU's.
It is becoming clear that standard construction is irredeemable, in the face of this strange toxin.

-Erik (2011)

* 

Mold was growing in that putty tape that RV’s use to seal the seams. I had some sealing the seam in my fiberglass shower pan and it was black. It gave me a reaction, so I think that was the source of the regrowth in my drain tubes.

-Erik (2012)

* 

When a friend’s sewer system went bad, I got something on my shoes, socks and ankles just from walking through the area where his chair sat.

What came off my shoes at home contaminated my living space.

Something that I was so reactive to that it put what appeared to be burns on my feet, like a Stevens-Johnson Syndrome reaction.

Unbelievable.

Like a freaking horror film.

I tried washing, heat, sunlight. Nothing worked.

My friend was bothered too.

But he was like I was in my own precursor stage.

He was fatigued and achy, poor sleep.

Clearly he had not yet been triggered into auto immunity.

-Erik (2015)

* 

>The scary story was the one where the Hell Toxin grew on the glue (labeled as "mold resistant") even when no cellulose was present nearby, and then drove you out of your camper for years. Do you think that it was feeding on the glue alone?

The Hell Toxin was sending tendrils into the wood, even if the wood had not rotted,
giving the appearance that by taking a bit from the glue and a bit from the wood, it was surviving in a niche where one or the other would have been unfavorable.

This is the ingredient from the glue.


- Erik (2015)

* 

As an experiment, I tried leaving my "killer shoes" on the roof of my camper for months. I finally reached a point where I tossed them.

- Erik (2015)
Chapter 24

Locations Effect

NOTICING THE EFFECT

I noticed the locations effect when I observed there was a vague correlation, but the contradictions seemed overwhelming and inconsistent.

Then I found that locations were not the overriding factor. It was the degree and persistence of immunological upregulation to neurotoxic exposures that changed just enough between certain locations to make the effect apparent and the inconsistencies that cause people to dismiss the locations effect were resolved.

So I learned to control the effect without leaving Incline Village.

-Erik (2005)
We need to do a Mold Rating Guide for Travelers.

Just kidding. It wouldn't work due to the variable factors of spore cloud release from humidity and barometric pressure change.

Not to mention wind direction change and plume vectors as cold fronts pass through.

This lifestyle is darn tricky.

-Erik (2004)

*

I've found no particular correlation of high mycotoxin levels in snowy areas.

And Las Vegas is full of sick buildings.

-Erik (2005)

*

The most dangerous misconception people have is trying to project conditions which might be likely to be toxigenic waste dumps and make plans according.

I've been slam dunked in Vegas and had a wonderful time in Florida.

Some of the newest buildings are the absolute worst.

Trying to conceive of which conditions may cause places to be toxic and using these ideas as a guide will drive you crazy.

"It is where it is."

-Erik (2006)

*

As for the mountains, I don't see where altitude makes any difference in terms of mold potential. This stuff is where it is.
I've been through Arizona and parts of Florida, and some places were okay and others were not. I don't try to predict where mold is. Been proven wrong too many times. I just perceptify it to feel mold hits, and act accordingly.

-Erik (2006)

*

I know this is going to sound crazy, but all my experience tells me that trying to predict where the bad mold is, based on a set of climate or "old house" expectations, is so counterproductive that it can very well create the exact opposite of the desired result.

Trying to predict just drives people nuts. It usually doesn't turn out how one expects anyway, so I just take it as it comes and take action accordingly.

-Erik (2008)

*

The situation changes so quickly that maps are of extremely limited value.

Trying to pin this down is like chasing shadows.

It's there, and then gone. Utterly erratic.

Reno vacillates wildly every day. I have to take each situation into account as it happens.

-Erik (2010)

OTHER COUNTRIES

What I found in the desert was a shift, not a sudden cure. It was just a direction in which to push.

I know of several people who couldn't get decent results anywhere in the USA, but did in other countries.

-Erik (2008)

*

This morning I was talking with a Vietnam veteran.
I had to monitor where I stood while we talked, moving around in accordance with wind direction so as not to be downwind of him.

He was pretty well doused with "X." We were discussing his health problems.

If I moved to another country and he came to visit, I would still be unable to stand downwind of him.

I had this same effect in Crete, many years ago.

The entire area of the Eastern coastline, White Mountains, Lasithi Plateau, Samarian Gorge...all good.

But when I was with European tourists, I had to avoid them exactly as I have to avoid people who pass through certain areas of Incline Village, so the difference is not great and it is all about the same to me.

-Erik (2010)

* 

It's always been a bit of mystery to me that when I describe sidestepping a plume by as little as a hundred yards, somehow the "Locations Effect" appears to be much more desirably pursued by moving to a completely different country or continent.

I mean, it sounds nice and exotic, but I have a job here.

-Erik (2010)

A SHORT TRIP

Talk about a "budget trip."

I can go one mile due north of Lake Tahoe - say, up to Watson Lake - and feel great.

The bad molds are lighting up like crazy all over the place in houses everywhere, but if I just barely get out of spore plume range, I do just fine.

-Erik (2006)

* 

I've talked with people who went to Mexico and felt great there.
But I can go about fifteen miles north and accomplish the same thing, so it's just an average commute... to a good location.

-Erik (2009)

*  

> Did you get the impression that you could live a more or less full life in Greece without having to avoid mold?

Yes, that is exactly what I said to myself when I was there.

"If I lived here, I wouldn't have to do any mold avoidance at all."

But then, I feel that way whenever I just get up north of Tahoe. And that's within easy driving distance.

-Erik (2009)

*

One person who doesn't want to admit to being a Moldie and thinks of herself as a Lyme sufferer got slam dunked in Reno and made a spectacular recovery out at Ft Churchill on Hwy. 50.

Amazingly enough, one of the places where I used to go and get clear.

Not that these exotic locations don't sound terrific...but the biting bugs, scorpions, rattlers out in the baking-hot rock-strewn Godforsaken sagebrush riddled dusty desert have their own peculiar charm too.

-Erik (2010)

*

Truckee is not all bad. Just like the school. Use the side entrance and it's tolerable.

-Erik (2015)

*

Truckee High School, site of the famous teacher cluster that started Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

This is where I started thinking in terms of locations effect.

Because to get out of the zone where I was being affected, I had to get away from the school.

But how far? Did I have to travel to different countries?

No. Just to the other side of that flagpole.

That’s how far it went. And I was out of it.

Actually, some days I would get beyond the flagpole and feel better.

Others I would sit there in agony, wondering why I was still slammed.

I didn't know about cross-contamination back then.

-Erik (2015)

THINK PRISTINE

Instead of dry or wet climate, think "pristine" as opposed to highly developed.

It is modern materials, types of construction, and specific chemicals that provide the basis for overgrowth of toxin producing molds.

-Erik (2006)

* There’s no comparison to the GodForsakenDesert.

I began using that expression because when I talked about the unbelievably beautiful Ruby Mountains, wide expanses of high desert sagebrush, Sand Mountain, Wheeler Peak and Great Basin National Park, people would say, "Nevada? But that's all Godforsaken desert."

Crazy people! God lives here. It's civildevastation that God has forsaken.

-Erik (2010)
I've found tons of people who would go to a forest or beach and believe that the tranquility of nature was giving them "healing peace," when you could find plenty in their descriptions which showed that they were really reducing their inflammation from toxic exposure inside their houses.

-Erik (2010)

NEGATIVE IONS

> The ocean gives off a ton of negative ions.

So this would be consistent the observation of feeling especially good near waterfalls, even when the surrounding region is not quite as good.

But the really good "good locations" remain good, ions or not, which suggests that the ions are precipitating something out of the air in bad places.

It would be the bad stuff that is being subtracted out of the equation by negative ions which would be the culprit responsible for the differential between good and bad zones.

The way I see it, going to the desert and feeling good in all weather conditions regardless of ion influence tells me that it's not the ions per se.

If the ions play any part, it must be influencing something in "bad locations" that is not present to be influenced in those "good places" where one can be exposed to any level of positive or negative ion shift and feel no change.

I think we should be looking for something that is precipitated by ions and not so much at the ions.

-Erik (2006)

* 

>I bought a small ion generator.

I experimented with one of those too, and it did indeed cause a mess where particulates would drop right in front of it.

I just got back from Ft. Churchill, an old Civil War outpost and Pony Express station out in the Nevada desert. It felt great, as it always has. The weather can do anything it likes, emitting ions of whatever sort it chooses, and I still feel great.
As far as I'm concerned, that rules out ions for being the agent responsible for the shift in symptoms. If anything, the ions are precipitating "whatever" it really is.

-Erik (2006)

**SAND**

I live in Nevada.

When I stumbled over being better on the coast in 1987, I was pretty bummed.

That's one hell of a long way from where I'm at.

We may not have any oceans nearby, but we do have some pretty ripp[448x502]ing beaches.

They just happen to be entirely devoid of water.

Like Sand Mountain.

I felt just as good there. Maybe even better.

-Erik (2015)

**PYRAMIDS**

> I wonder if anyone wants to hazard a rational guess why a person would feel well on top of a pyramid?

I would speculate, off the top of my head, that the shape and mass of the pyramid acts as an electrostatic-discharge-wick for the ground plane of the surrounding terrain.

And that similarly to Niagara Falls, the focused flow of negative ions cancels out innate inflammatory responses composed of high rates of free radical production.

So inflammation damps down and people feel a surge of wellness.

That is, if they have ion channelopathy occurring at a level which would dictate a change in how they feel.
If they were reasonably well, it is conceivable they might feel no change at all and would consider anyone who said they felt something to be totally insane.

-Erik (2009)

* Everything that exists possesses some kind of electrostatic potential. Any differential between two objects sets up the conditions for a flow of current. Whether or not one could call it "mystical," we do know that energy is there. It has to be.

The question is whether the people who claim to feel it are mistaken or whether science just hasn't developed the tools to measure what these people claim to feel.

As to the power of pyramids to accomplish other things, humans seem to have great difficulty in sticking to the facts and avoiding exaggeration, which might possibly disguise a real phenomenon behind a wall of tomfoolery.

-Erik (2009)

**KOA**

I've been in some of those KOA Kampin Kabins - pre-fab log cabins - which were terrific. Very Kozy.

-Erik (2008)

**HOME DEPOT**

A quick trip down through Home Depot would knock me for a loop.

I remember walking by the carpet aisle, and somebody looked at me and went, "Oh my God!"

I rushed to a mirror, and I had turned bright red. Like the Sith from Star Wars, but without the horns.

Crazy illness, eh?
I can go there whenever I want now though.

-Erik (2009)

**TAHOE-TRUCKEE**

I am in shock about how bad Truckee has become lately.

In the past it was small and sporadic, and as long as I moved through the small zones quickly, not a huge problem.

Now I'm scared to drive through, even on the best of days.

I have the feeling that I must be imagining this, but if I am, then I am imagining everything.

If I didn't have so much experience with this, and hadn't had so much success by dealing with it using avoidance, I'd be completely overwhelmed into stunned disbelief.

When I get that dagger in the heart feeling, I know that if I don't decontaminate within fifteen minutes, I am really going to be hating life for a couple of days.

There is not much time before the cytokine cascade starts, I have literally run for my MECU.

There is no time to lose, you cannot wait.

Even if the MECU is hit, decontamination has still worked for me, as this stuff seems to tenfold deadly on your clothing and in your hair, as it is just ten feet away.

But dealing with such a huge zone? Not much one can do...except drive further and hope to get out of it.

This is absolutely nuts.

This whole thing is so bizarre that it's hard to make good choices when all that is left are bad ones.

But I can assure you that if someone were to try and keep me in Truckee, I would fight them to the death to get out.

-Erik (2010)

*
I drove through Truckee the other night and a place which is moderately bad with "the effect" positively pulsed with power.

My truck felt like hell after driving through. If I hadn't practiced the techniques of biowarfare survival that I learned in the military, I would have been overwhelmed and destroyed long ago.

I have been on the run from this mysterious effect for 25 straight years, and am staying just barely one step ahead of the devil.

If people don't investigate this voluntarily, all they will be accomplishing is greater helpless ignorance when it hits them like an asteroid strike.

-Erik (2010)

* 

>How bad is Truckee? Bad enough that driving your camper through it for ten minutes is enough to make it unlivable for weeks?

Perhaps not for weeks, but enough to be pure misery for three or four days.

I am going to the trouble to drop off my camper, make a quick dash, and then load up again.

I've never felt it this bad before when the weather is so good. That is not a good sign for the future.

There are areas along the Truckee River that feel bad enough that I am only drinking distilled water, rather than take a chance on the tap water in Reno.

-Erik (2010)

* 

I was in Tahoe a week ago and ran into a plume that massacred my truck. It was really bad. This stuff just comes and goes.

I feel like I'm taking a chance, every time I go. I can deal with it pretty well, but I feel like I'm running a gauntlet.

With some of the plumes in Tahoe, even on a sunny day, it's still there. Incline was always bad. I gave up ever trying to drive through it. I would go around, always.

-Erik (2012)
A friend and I got nailed by the stuff in Truckee a week ago.

Yep. It's still there.

-Erik (2015)

RENO

East winds are the worst time for me in Reno. This is a classic weather pattern from Coriolis Effect as a strong winter arctic cold front skirts us to the North. We call it a "Tonapah Low."

-Erik (2008)

Reno is feeling pretty crappy right now.

All I have to do is drive up to mountains around Tahoe, and I'm pretty much out of the badness. I'm about to do that very thing.

Hope the mountains stay feeling good for a while longer.

-Erik (2008)

I remember when I was giving someone else a mold education here in Reno a few years ago and the Peppermill was right at my limit.

She had to get clear of Reno, and get all the way out to Fort Churchill, before she felt better. That was the clincher for her, in terms of believing what an incredible difference this makes.

The Peppermill has been much better since the old Park Lane Mall across the street was demolished and carted away.

-Erik (2009)
It is so hard to watch our environment going sour, and it’s so unbelievable how little that people seem to care.

I just returned to my safe zone in the north of Reno.

The southern section sucks today. So it is good to be out of the worst of it.

I don't know how much longer this area will remain decent.

Last winter it was raked by sporadic plumes, and if it gets any worse, I'm going to have to bail out of here.

-Erik (2009)

*

Reno sucks right now. The arrival of the Pacific air mass seems to have triggered the ick.

We got about four inches of snow in Reno, which made the Christmas tree lots very pretty, but the character of the storm just changed. The warm Pacific front just arrived and the temperature went way up. The wind just hit with a bang.

The snow has turned to rain and what is on the ground is swiftly melting away.

I felt the "ick" ramp up about 5 am, and by 7:30, it was going gangbusters.

If I didn't have my MECU, I'd be hating life, big time!

I am in a not-so-good building, and am going to have to retreat to my MECU in a few minutes. Definitely a situation that calls for decon.

-Erik (2010)

*

>How do you find the air quality in the Reno area?

Barely tolerable. I found a place that is in-between zones that were unacceptable. I venture through them and am glad that where I'm at is somewhat better.

I've been thinking of moving further north, where the air quality is much better.

-Erik (2011)
CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA

Nevada is awesome. Very low mold, when you get outside of the cities.

I've had mild mold reactions to some piles of rotten wood, but nothing strong like Stachy. Most of the old ghost town buildings are so desiccated that I feel nothing there at all.

-Erik (2002)

*

Las Vegas is absolutely filthy with mold. Those darn air conditioners are mold heaven.

-Erik (2004)

*

I used to live in San Anselmo, in a place that made me sick. Rainiest, darkest, miserablest, mossiest and moldiest area I ever lived.

SA, Ross and Kentfield get the heaviest rainfall totals of anywhere in the Bay Area. Spore plumes rampant everywhere you go. Very difficult place to recover, even if you do manage to find a safe house.

East Bay is better, but there are some ferocious plumes in Berserkely to watch out for.

-Erik (2006)

*

I used to live directly on the ocean, just about dead center of this picture.

This was my hang gliding class at Dillon Beach.

Of course, if the wind is blowing off the ocean, there can't be any mold.

But if I went up to the store at Lawson’s Landing, I was in the midst of houses. If they were moldy houses, as is very common on the coast, I was in the midst of mold.

So, yeah, right on the coast is good, just as long as there aren't any moldy places upwind.

If I weren't constrained by financial considerations and had latitude to travel, I'd do my best to get out of the snow entirely. Cold weather is like a trap for Moldies.
Too cross contaminated and sick to stay inside.... too cold to crawl outside.

It is so much easier to deal with if you can get outside in the winter.

Although I didn't feel too well downwind of certain cities, the Southwest felt very good to me when I was moving a friend down to Texas a few years ago.

-Erik (2008)

*

If I had my druthers for a winter retreat, think I'd head for the Southwest. Arizona, Utah, southern Nevada.

But most of the low-population areas along the coast have been pretty good too. Big Sur was awesome.

Monterey and Morro Bay were killers. San Francisco.... well, ya just gotta get through as quick as you can.

North Bay, not so good until up past San Rafael.

-Erik (2008)

*

Down in Carson City, there are some plumes that had me down on the ground with the dry heaves.

Thank goodness for my MECU. I bailed out of the bad zone and went up to the woods to recover.

-Erik (2008)

*

Don't even think about San Francisco.

Mongo plumes running around the Bay Area. Used to be a real whack just south of Gilman, but north of University, in Berkeley.
Sacramento is bad, bad, bad. Ugh. There are plenty of places around there, like the Pony Express museum, Old Town and the KOA near the turn-off for Business 80 that made me turn and run. Too many stray plumes.

-Erik (2008)

*

Today, a local DJ described Death Valley as a "Feel Good Place" where somehow, for some reason, it just feels good out there.

Yaz-indeedy! And if there are any ticks out there, at least they're frying their little butts off while they try to get at you.

-Erik (2008)

*

Morro Bay was an absolute nightmare for me. All parts of town to the south of Morro Rock were death defying.

There is a campground next to the golf course and museum that I stayed at for two nights because the group I was with liked it there, but I could feel within minutes that the place was really bad. I won't be going back.

-Erik (2009)

*

I used to love Santa Cruz, and now I fear it. Within the last twenty years, the whole area has gone sour.

If you want a good blast of the “bad stuff,” go down to the kayak shop at the entrance to the marina. I parked next to the place and within thirty seconds, I was fumbling to get my rig started as quickly as possible to get the hell out of there.

I am growing increasingly concerned about all of southern California. The last time I drove down that direction, I was amazed at how many more plumes I encountered than just a few years previously.

-Erik (2009)
I felt terrific at Mono Lake.

-Erik (2010)

*

There's a plume in Carson City that runs from Silver Sage to Roop Street, and all the way out to Eagle Valley. C Hill is a mess. I used to take walks there, but couldn't stand it any longer.

-Erik (2011)

*

I like all of northern Nevada.

-Erik (2015)

*

I can vouch for plumes in Morgan Hill.

-Erik (2015)

SOUTHWEST AND MOUNTAIN STATES

Some of the worst areas for mold are the places everybody thinks are mold free, like some of the low-cost housing on Indian reservations in Arizona and New Mexico.

Dr. Craner and Linda Stetzenbach have identified hundreds of sick buildings in Las Vegas and Reno.

Moving to the desert won't get you out of this if you are living in a house with the potential for mold processed right into the building materials and have a leak.

While I believe that a desert gives you an advantage in mold avoidance, it means nothing if it's in your house.

-Erik (2002)

*

I just got back from Colorado and Utah.
I hit all the national parks - Arches, Bridges, Dead Horse Point, Canyonlands, and that wondrous mold-free construction at Mesa Verde.

Awesome. Felt great. No mold except in town at Moab.

-Erik (2006)

*  

Pagosa Springs felt terrific. In Durango there were a couple of bad places in town, but overall not too bad.

My friend in Pagosa Springs says she's doing well there. She's trying to talk me into moving there. Considering how good it felt to me, I've given it some consideration. It reminds me of how Truckee used to be, before it got so touristy.

And I recall out at Mesa Verde, looking at Native American cave dwellings, feeling so good out there, and thinking, "Oh yes...move me in!"

-Erik (2008)

*  

The Southwest is generally pretty darn good.

But testing by going to a region is easily defeated by having the misfortune to find a bad place in a good region.

Like a friend and I did in Moab. Who'da thunk there'd be any bad stuff there?

-Erik (2008)

*  

I stumbled over the stuff in Moab.

It was between the bicycle shop and the shopping mall in the center of town, just south of where the makes a turn.

Then I was at the parking lot for the trail to Delicate Arch. I sat down at a picnic table and got slammed. The entire area for about thirty feet around that table was just rampant.
It was right next to the parking lot, so I thought perhaps someone with a moldy RV must have parked there. Although the badness was centered on the table, and not the parking lot - I checked.

Those things are just lighting up all over.

Crazy stuff. Too crazy for me to figure out.

Just got to be prepared at all times for quick evacuation and decontamination.

-Erik (2010)

**FLORIDA**

Florida was about like everywhere else, far as I can tell: sourcepoints surrounded by intermittent plumage.

Everyone told me that Florida would be the worst place on the planet for someone like me, yet I had a wonderful time in Clearwater, Tampa and Busch Gardens.

The only town that I remember being ambiently bad enough that I couldn't wait to get out of there was Tampa's Little Havana section.

This area felt about the same to me as Old Town Sacramento. Fun to visit. Can't stay long. Decontaminate afterwards.

And yes, I was a bit surprised that Florida wasn't worse than it was. That went a long way toward shaking me out of trying to make predictions on bad locations.

-Erik (2008)

**GREECE**


Of all the places I've been, this was the best by far. I've heard from others who experienced “the miracle” in Crete.

-Erik (2008)

*
I've heard from a number of people who went to Greece and felt great. Scarcely any need for avoidance, and the improvement was spectacular.

-Erik (2009)

*

I toured Crete back in the mid-seventies, and felt fine the whole time.

When I went back in the early nineties, I was startled at feeling plumes where I hadn't felt them before. Some in Iraklion. Hania in particular.

I walked the city fortress walls that encircle Heraklion and had to evade a few plumes along the way.

Athens was troublesome, especially around the Acropolis and Plaka, yet I had much more energy climbing Lycabettus Hill to St. George's temple.

Got a pretty good smack right at the Olympic Stadium, which really slowed me down as I walked the perimeter.

-Erik (2009)

*

> Belgrade is a good location because the buildings are mostly made of cement.

Greece shares this trait, as most of the structures are made with concrete. And mostly it felt pretty good.

But some of the new hotels and museums were absolute murder.

I did not find one bad place high up in the White Mountains or the Lasithi Plateau.

Delphi had a few plumes.

-Erik (2009)

*

Long time ago but Crete was amazing.

I only got hit twice, in Hania and Iraklion.

I just stayed in hotels. I can't remember the names.
Most were amazingly good.

I bicycled around the circumference of Crete and up the Lasithia Plateau.

All pretty good except for one terrible place in Hania that just about did me in.

-Erik (2015)

**BOSTON**

Back in the late 1990's there were very few mold stories.

California, Ohio, and Boston.

Why Boston, I couldn't figure out.

-Erik (2015)

**HAWAII**

Hawaii (state) is tropical but it experiences many different climates, depending on altitude and weather. The islands receive most rainfall from the trade winds on their north and east flanks (the windward side) as a result of orographic precipitation. Coastal areas in general and especially the south and west flanks or leeward sides, tend to be drier.

I asked a bunch who were on the windward and leeward side in Hawaii to compare notes.

The Leewards didn't notice Hawaii was much better, but the Windwards all did.

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 25

Weather

SUN AND RAIN

Mold spores are primed to release their toxins at times of weather change, when conditions of wind and potential water give spores their best chance for dispersion and survival.

-Erik (2006)

*

Plumes are much worse during rainy weather.

Isn’t it amazing that people have known for eons that a "blue-sky day" is a happy feel-good kind of day, but had no idea why that was?

High pressure suppresses toxin release.

Low pressure, as in a prefrontal barometric pressure drop, causes times of release.
Now, think about it for a minute.

You have felt symptom exacerbation before the rain even hit, so you know the rain’s not it.

But what happens before a storm? The pre-frontal pressure drop.

And you have also felt the situation reverse itself.

The effect doesn’t appear to be the cold, or the rain, but just the shift in pressure and humidity.

If we had a bunch of Moldies cruising around in MECU’s, comparing toxin release, mold zones, escape routes and plume sizes...we could probably work up a decent cohesive working model of what is happening.

-Erik (2008)

*

>Wouldn’t a rainstorm send all the spores to the ground?

You’d sure think so. But no, rain or snow doesn’t clean the spores out of the air.

-Erik (2008)

*

When checking out prospective locations, one needs to feel the area at its worst.

So you need to be there at a time of weather change.

-Erik (2015)

**SUICIDE SEASON**

The winter storms are stirring up the mold colonies and blasting out vastly increased clouds of spores which can go great distances.

Some bad places in summer are localized, but extend their range so much that I have to avoid going downwind of them in winter.

-Erik (2005)
* 

In fall, the increased moisture replenishes mold colonies and allows them to become more active.

-Erik (2006)

* 

Mold is worse in winter.

I remember thinking that if I could only figure out how to control my mold exposure during the winter, at the very least I could expect to feel no worse during the winter than I did in summer.

To my amazement, a concerted effort at extreme avoidance of that substance did far more than I ever expected.

-Erik (2008)

* 

I refer to October through January as "Suicide Season."

When the winter storms start unleashing the plumes in late October, the ambient badness seems to exert a depressing influence on nearly everyone. It seems to peak right around the Christmas holidays.

Yeah, I know. Everyone blames the Christmas blech on the stress of shopping, relatives, etc.

But the more you look at the peculiar lack of a real solid emotional stimulus to really correlate to just how much people lose it this time of year, I think you'll agree.

There is a generalized neurotoxin shift the puts the edge on everyone and it shows, if you know what you're looking for. And it appears to me that every year, it gets just a bit worse.

By the end of January, sometime in February, it seems to start easing up.

-Erik (2008)

* 

October through March are the months when I used to want to shoot myself, before I discovered that I could escape that seasonal downturn completely by mold avoidance.
So I called it “Suicide Season,” which is how I felt.

- Erik (2010)

* 

It seems like the winter downturn has been stronger this year, and much harder to stay free of this crap, no matter where we are.

We’re only a month away from the time I normally associate with the effect beginning to slack off.

Hopefully, soon we’ll get somewhat of a respite.

- Erik (2010)

* 

“Suicide Season” is what I used to call November through April.

When the mold amps up.

But the better name is "The November Factor."

- Erik (2015)

A STORM HITS

A storm hit Reno last night, and now everything has gone to crap around here.

The sourcepoints, like a few in this building, are all emitting their badness.

Just like clockwork. It is amazingly predictable.

So I’m about ready to head on up the hill.

- Erik (2008)

* 

Lisa got to witness a spectacular demonstration of storm release.

We were out at a campground, which is semi-downwind of Truckee.
Although there was no precipitation, a windstorm came up. (Lisa, remember how strong the wind was?)

First the campground felt good, and then it felt bad.

The plume laid down an accumulation which forced Lisa to get up in the middle of the night. (Remember? You were ready to hop in your car and bail out right at that moment?)

The next morning, the sun hit the accumulation and caused even more toxin release, which made the whole area feel terrible.

I said that it would dissipate in just a couple of hours.

I grabbed a stick and drew a diagram in the dirt, showing the Coriolis effect that makes a storm front passing to the north cause the wind to gradually switch around until we were right in the crosshairs of the plume.

We could have just gone further north to get out of it, but instead we went for a walk up the hill to get some fresh air. By the time we got back, the release was dying down.

It was having a hang glider pilot’s knowledge of micrometeorology that allows me to see this connection.

-Erik (2008)

*

So long as I avoid carrying "the badness" on my rig out to the GFD, I have always been able to elude the WeaTherFront response.

(Learned the hard way after many years of exclaiming “WTF??!!!”)

But if the "badness" is in my clothes or glommed onto my rig, it acts up like crazy when the fronts go through.

This is where a trailer is a boon to avoidance strategies. I don’t take my trailer to Truckee and it stays good - while my truck, which I do take to Truckee, becomes a diabolical device of transportable toxic torment.

I just went through Truckee about 1 am this morning and my truck got slammed. It was good to get away from it and back to my trailer.

-Erik (2010)
SUNNY DAY SLAM

Where I built my MECU, the area was being plumed. It occurred when the wind was from the southwest, so that seemed consistent.

But then, the sun would come up next day and we would all feel slammed. The spores that were freshly spread out would be set off by the sun's intensity.

I tried to discount the association because it seemed that there were too many contradictions. But then it just seemed to crop up again.

At first the "sunny day slam" seemed to disprove the weather association...but not really. There were just further effects that needed to be factored into the equation.

-Erik (2008)

*

I talked my friends who lived near the compost farm to check the wind, to see if the sunny day slam correlated.

Sure enough, the day after the wind blew from that direction, about 9-10 am, POW, the ground would turn toxic.

This was predictable, reproducible and very compelling.

This is all part of putting the clues together about what kind of environment you are in and where the exposures are coming from.

-Erik (2010)

*

Reno really sucks right now. The whole town is bad.

A storm went through and laid out a blanket of surface contamination which would not be noticeable unless anyone laid down and stuck their face on the ground.

Now the sun has come out and the toxin release is absolutely awful.

But of course, if they test the air for spore counts, they won't find a thing out of the ordinary.

-Erik (2010)
**FULL MOON**

My intense reactivity to mold allows me to make observations that others have no interest in, but which are critical factors to me.

The intense gravity at the full moon initiates a greater propensity for mycotoxin release.

This is similar to weather changes, when areas of toxigenic molds should be avoided to escape increased exposure to mycotoxins.

-Erik (2006)

**ION SHIFT**

On our camping trip, Lisa and I were able to compare the relative shift of the ambient presence of badness after a plume was laid down.

We could determine that the place had been plumed by the fact that it had been good before the wind. The wind was coming from a bad place and the good place went bad.

We could evade the badness by going further north. Further confirmation.

What we could both feel at roughly the same time is that the badness would take off like a rocket at times of atmospheric ion shift, in the pre-dawn hours when the positive charge changes to negative.

So the working hypothesis is that the moon is exerting an ion shift in the atmosphere which is causing the badness to fire up.

The variability of the conditions which sets up this phenomenon make it seem so arbitrary and confusing that a positive correlation is not made until you set up the right conditions for the test with the right people who know what they are looking to find.

-Erik (2008)

*

That 4 a.m. blanket weirdness didn't happen to me when I was out camping in the desert.

The only way I could recreate the problem was by deliberately taking blankets into moldy places and then bringing them out to the desert.
That narrowed down what it was, and what I had to do to keep from being slammed.

-Erik (2008)

BAROMETRIC PRESSURE

Barometric pressure gradients change the ambient level of mycotoxins.

I finally found a simple way to demonstrate the effect.

I locate a particularly nasty outdoor mold spore plume and park a car there.

The place I like to use for this demonstration has a road that runs horizontally in a valley with steep side roads.

The first thing people notice is how bad they feel after the car has been contaminated.

So I ask them, "If you weren't sensitive to this car before, what do you think constitutes the difference?"

I let them stew for a bit and mull it over.

Then we drive on the horizontal road until people get a sense for their level of response.

Now I ask them to carefully assess their symptoms to look for any change and turn onto ascending road and quickly gain at least 300 feet of elevation.

I've had some people react and notice the difference within the first 30 feet of altitude gain.

As soon as somebody learns to recognize that something just dramatically changed and agrees that we can both feel it, I say, "Now for the good part!" and turn around and drive quickly back down the hill.

It's amazing. The mycotoxin release actually shuts down so quickly that people feel better than they did while driving on the horizontal road.

I needed a conceptual model to explain this phenomenon so the one I have used for the last six years is that mold spores are like balloons that are slowly leaking mycotoxins.

A quick drop in the barometric pressure gradient causes an increase in mycotoxin release.
A quick increase pressurizes the spore/balloon and the rate of mycotoxin release is actually less than at times of neutral pressure.

My belief is that this is the explanation for the way people feel so good at initiation of the high pressure system associated with good weather. People don't just feel good - they feel as good as they can feel.

Conversely when the pressure gradient drops and the ambient levels of mycotoxins increase - people feel about as bad as they ever feel if they are in an area that is contaminated with mold spores.

When I am in a mold-free area the weather change has no effect on me because there is no increased ambient levels of mycotoxins induced by the effect of a pressure gradient from an approaching cold weather front acting upon accumulations of mold spores.

-Erik (2004)

*  
The best way is to use your perception to identify these locations.

Go camping in the desert or wilderness to establish a baseline for low reactivity. Take little with you and make sure what you take is freshly laundered.

Once you are as free of irritants as you can be - go directly to your proposed location for testing and sleep there.

Be there during cold weather systems so the barometric pressure gradient will ensure you feel the place at its very worst.

If the place is intolerable just before a storm, move on.

-Erik (2005)

*  
Altitude has nothing to do with it.

It is the barometric pressure gradient that makes the difference.

That's why people blame the change in the weather - the pressure drop preceding a cold front. It is the rate of pressure decrease that people implicate and not any particular atmospheric pressure itself.
And like I said before, if it were the pressure change that directly causes the symptom exacerbation, people would complain equally about each and every situation that exerted such a pressure change.

But they don’t.

They single out one type of pressure change as being the greatest factor in their illness. Weather change.

Yes I know that capillary hypoperfusion and hypercoagulation means that oxygen transport can be altered by available oxygen and decreasing oxygen uptake feels bad.

But if that were a consistent influence that could be corrected by lower altitude, every CFS’er in Incline Village would have fled for the lower regions years ago.

I just got back from a great camping trip to Death Valley and stayed at Furnace Creek, several hundred feet below sea level.

Yes, it was a feel-good place. I climbed the sand dunes, biked the Borax mines, hiked up Golden Canyon and Zabriskie Point.

I had a great time until I got to Scotty’s Castle and went into the gift shop. The place is moldy and had the effect on me that all feel-bad places do. So I was forced to decontaminate before having an immune over-response that is the driving force in my symptoms.

It makes no difference whether the mold is at high altitude or low. When I am completely free of mycotoxin contamination I feel exactly the same whether I am in the depths of Death Valley or backpacking at 12,000 feet on the John Muir trail.

It is the barometric pressure gradient that causes intense mycotoxin release and suddenly turns moderately survivable places into living hell.

-Erik (2005)

*Mold produces more potent secondary metabolites when it has the proper conditions - humidity and substrate.

People who are living directly in spore plumes often get worse in the winter as the exposure to more potent toxins increases.

If you are "mold susceptible" and are not living in a particularly moldy place, symptoms may be associated with summer months when mold colonies dry up and release lighter
spores which stay airborne more easily. Non-viable spores still contain their toxic secondary metabolites, so killing the mold makes no difference.

We undergo changes in barometric pressure every time we change altitude. Planes, elevators, driving up a hill.

If this "pressure causes pain" concept were true people would complain about pain in association with all changes of barometric pressure equally.

Yet they don't.

For some peculiar reason, people always think of "barometric pressure change" as a pain inducer being weather specific.

That's because the barometric pressure and humidity unleashes mold spore plumes and increases the ambient levels of mycotoxins.

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 26

Detox

GETTING CLEAR

Years of dinking with this damned response to mycotoxins led me to the conviction that the dissociation constant of neurotoxins stored in the lipids is determined and modulated by inflammatory cytokines.

To put it simply, as long as you are suffering from an inflammatory response to this particular trigger, the body won't allow it to be metabolized.

I came up with the bizarre notion that if I could do whatever it takes to completely free myself from any exposure for at least an hour a day, it would allow the body a chance to break the response and allow dissociation of mycotoxins.

Much to my amazement, it worked for me and another person I taught this to.

I've been practicing this concept for years but have run into problems in neighborhoods that have spore plumes rolling through. If I walk into a spore plume, then I am back into
the inflammatory response and any further effort is wasted. I have to go back home and decontaminate and take another route to get the benefit of the detoxification process.

-Erik (2002)

*

My own personal opinion is that the body will not allow dissociation of toxins while in an inflammatory state.

I believe this is why MCS’ers have to go to the desert to recover and have very limited success by merely reducing exposure.

The slightest hit and detox turns off.

-Erik (2004)

*

> If you've got a lot of toxic mold in your house, wouldn't it be all over your clothes? And in that case, wouldn't that mean that people would be upregulated all the time, meaning that they never would detox?

I'm not so sure about that. While it seems logical on the face of it, it almost feels to me like the body is constantly testing the waters, trying to detox, even when you are in a bad place.

If it's a relatively lower mold day, sometimes it strikes me that the body has no other choice but to try to damp itself down and start to dump toxins anyway, as a survival mechanism.

Don't know, just my impression.

-Erik (2008)

*

That was the interesting part about going to the GFD. It became apparent that in "civilidevastation," I wasn't detoxing.

The slightest continuing exposure was putting toxins into storage mode. I might not be getting worse, but neither was I getting better.

As time went along and I improved by seeking out GFD’ism, it became easier to reach the threshold at which the body seemed to sense that it was safe enough to release sequestered toxins.
Yup. A portion of the toxin-burden was going wherever I went.

The stories of those who are less ill who seem capable of detoxing even in a fairly non-terrific place seems to bear out a correlation that the less far you've gone, the easier to find such places.

It also seems like there is a point at which people become so ill and the body is so saturated that no place is pristine enough to be safe, and if medicine cannot save them, they're pretty much gone.

-Erik (2010)

*

I tried an experiment of going out to the Godforsaken Desert after noticing how much better I felt when away from mold.

The upshot was that it seems that the slightest exposure prevents the body from dumping these toxins. Being in town wasn't cutting it.

I had to really get clear in order to recover.

-Erik (2011)

IN THE “DESERT”

The glorious thing about the deep woods or GodForsaken Desert is that I could intensify to a point at which the toxins must surely be blazing forth from my body, judging by the incredibly acute reactions I would get by simply coming back in contact with anything from my camper.

Amazing how I could sleep reasonably well in the thing while in a mold zone, and yet when my body sensed the opportunity to rid itself of toxins out in a really pristine place, my sensitivity would just go nuts.

But if I stay in that really pristine place and manage to avoid re-exposures, this process is relatively painless. It's doing something that would be extremely painful in a place where small random exposures would keep knocking me about.

That's why I am so adamant about going to the “desert.” It doesn't really have to be "Lawrence of Arabia” type desert. The deep woods are good enough too. It's the pristineness that counts.
As far as I can tell, it's the quickest, best, and least painless way of letting the body sense that it is okay to let loose of the stored-up toxins.

And to most people, it appears to be about the same as a camping trip, which is what a bunch of us call "having fun."

-Erik (2008)

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Basically, I stumbled over this when I was out in the desert and spent a lot of time outside. I found that after a couple of days, I could scarcely stand to be next to my camper.

"How odd," I thought, "that I could even be alive in an environment that could somehow contaminate something to feel worse than the bad environment itself. Something's not right with this picture."

And then it occurred to me that I must be detoxing. That this weirdness of getting worse was actually a good thing, because that was the way to get better.

So I set out to reproduce these conditions, to routinely detox in a preemptive fashion.

-Erik (2008)

* 

When I went into detox in the desert, the only way I could tell was that when I returned to town, re-exposures that put me on the ground were only bringing me to my knees.

"Aha, this must be improvement."

Even if it didn't necessarily feel like it at the time.

-Erik (2015)

* 

During the Tahoe Mystery Illness, people were reactive to their own sweat.

This was a sign to me that something was being excreted.

Another Incline survivor and I made a point of going to the desert to do just that, to try and get the "whatever" out of us.
We did infinitely better than anyone back in town.

It seemed to us that just going to the desert alone was not the answer. It only set the stage.

After arrival we had get away from our stuff and sweat.

-Erik (2015)

* 

If you recall my story of meeting another Incline Village survivor out in the desert, we both saw right away that just being there was not enough.

Once clear, we had to sweat, and we needed the exertion to set up a detox mode.

Neither of us saw this as a viable treatment at the time.

Rather, it was "a helluva clue" as to how this illness works.

-Erik (2015)

* 

I saw from my own GFD (Godforsaken Desert) experience that detox made me susceptible to volatiles from synthetics.

I think the reason many who try so hard are not making progress is that your tents and sleeping bags are preventing your detox.

-Erik (2015)

PROACTIVE DETOX

To keep myself from falling back into that level of reactivity, I have to proactively put myself in a state of detox on a regular basis.

I do this by getting out to a pristine location, breaking the response, and exercising to the point of inducing leptin signaling.

The body appears to be "smart enough" to allow just enough detox so the process is tolerable as long as I don't hit a re-exposure.
I believe this is the reason for post-exertional malaise. People induce a detox reaction, get back into an exposure situation and fall apart.

-Erik (2008)

*

What I have been doing all these years is preemptively seeking those pristine places that induce an intensification reaction, on the basis that, "This is detox...and I need to detox often to keep myself from falling lower and lower on the power curve of immune activity."

Sometimes I would get out to the woods and start to intensify, and my fingers would swell up like crazy. I took another Moldie with me and we both experienced the same thing at about the same time.

Yes, we thought, "It is consistent with the illness."

It looks like a bad thing, yet it is a good thing in disguise.

A little bit of weirdness now, for a whole lot less suffering later.

-Erik (2008)

*

It's an unfortunate fact that the stored toxins have to come out.

When you start to detox, it can feel like you must be doing something wrong.

There were even people who got to the desert and even though they felt better in fresh air and had more energy, would have elevated sensitivity and think they were getting sicker.

And would head home to be in the mold again.

-Erik (2015)

**DETOX PROCESS**

> If you go out into the “Godforsaken desert” now, does your intensification reaction still go up beyond what you get staying in campgrounds near Truckee?
Yes, I get a more intense intensification when I go down to Lone Pine for my annual Whitney climb.

As you saw from our campsite just outside Truckee, it's got its moments when the ambient levels are still enough to keep you upregulated.

But did you notice how things changed when we got further out in the woods up by Jackson Meadows? I stayed up there a couple more days after you left, and the residual hit eventually died down completely. It seems to take about a week.

I hate having to go back to Reno and dive into the muck again, but at least when I do, my tolerance has increased pretty dramatically after the desert detox.

-Erik (2008)

* * *

>I went camping in the Godforsaken desert this weekend. The air was absolutely amazing. Then I went to bed in the tent and slept really fitfully, worse than I had in a long time.

>When morning finally came and I put on my glasses, I realized they were all fogged up. I concluded that maybe I had been detoxing like mad through my breath, and that breathing that stuff back in had been making me feel bad. I had an annoying headache and felt really icky for about four hours.

>So that night, I took the rainfly off the tent. I slept fine for four hours and then woke up. The air felt kind of stale, much worse than outside. I realized I hadn't unzipped the rainfly part on the flaps on either side of the tent, so I did that. By now, it's almost all mesh. Like being in a screen room. Then I turned my sleeping bag and changed pillows.

>But the damage was done. I was up for three hours. Finally I went back to sleep. I slept fitfully again (perhaps in part because it was close to daybreak). When I woke up, there was a whole lot of condensation on the sleeping bag nylon where I was breathing. This despite the fact that the Godforsaken desert in NM is dry as a bone. I had another headache and didn't feel back to feeling really good again for hours.

>After getting back to normal, I checked out the tent and its contents to see if it would give me a reaction. It didn't bother me at all.....despite the fact that later that day, when I left the park, my sensitivity went off like crazy just about everywhere I went.

>What am I doing wrong?

You aren't doing anything wrong. I had that same exact reaction to my tent.

It is horrible to be trapped between bad zones which turn off intensification reaction, and
pristine zones which switch it on in a big way.

What I had to learn the hard way was to create a balance between spending time in bad zones and preemptively spending a great deal of time in pristine areas to do that detox through the breath that you describe so well.

Continually doing this is what kept me on the up side of the power curve. When this is done successfully, the pain in each zone is minimal.

>I went back to the Godforsaken desert. The sleeping bags had more moisture on them. Apparently I'm not only breathing out toxins, but I'm breathing out a lot of moisture. Another perplexing thing about going into the wilderness is that I seem to lose a huge amount of edema. Do you think the sleeping bag will be okay for future trips?

Agreed about the moisture.

It was when that edema response finally stopped happening that my thermoregulation kicked back in, and I could withstand a much greater range of temperature without feeling super uncomfortable.

Sleeping bag should be okay for future use. I just wash, and it seems to work. And I don't wash things for decon purposes if they aren't bothering me.

-Erik (2008)

*

It's a pain in the ass, but where you breathe while in detox mode is a powerful consideration that has to be factored in. I try to ease people into it without bringing it up by talking about sleeping on a cot, using blankets for a mattress, and swapping out the blankets as they go bad.

It doesn't really matter whether they go bad from ambient mold or from one's breath...just so long as you do it.

Once someone is used to the concept and feeling the benefit from it, it's easier to explain the detox through breathing without having them realize just how horrific this situation is.

-Erik (2008)

*
Does the amount of toxins that you breathe out each night seem to remain constant regardless of how long you remain in the Godforsaken desert? Or does it seem to start to diminish after you've spent a few nights there?

The first night, I have to move my face to a fresh sleeping surface about every fifteen minutes. It seems to taper off somewhere between 24 and 48 hrs. After that, it's clear sailing.

Makes you want to stay out in the woods....permanently.

> You move your face every 15 minutes?

The fifteen minute rule is a worst case scenario after superbad slam.

If I fail to move when I wake up and notice that I'm not feeling so hot, I pay for it with aftereffects that far exceed what one would think from just a few heart palps and slight brain compression feeling. But like I say, this is only after bad slams, and not a total way of life.

It has proven to be much better to swiftly wake up and make the move than try to ignore it.

-Erik (2008)

*

As far as I can tell, one just has to keep moving during intensification or the heightened sensitivity allows you no peace.

I kept having to tell myself, "Although it feels bad, this is a sign that I'm detoxing."

After a while, I began to notice that I could feel mold strongly but that it wasn't bothering me so much. It was just that I could perceive it.

I took this to mean that my body had intentionally created this incredible sensitivity as a means of keeping me out of future trouble.

-Erik (2008)

*

When I was in "intens-react" stage, I couldn't get downwind of a paint shop. New cars would light me up. The carpet section at Home Depot made me run. And isn't it wonderful paying for a motel room and find out after a couple of hours that you cannot stay alive in there, and have to just move on down the road?
I haven't yet seen anyone at the "crawl-out-of-the-house" stage accomplish a successful increase in tolerance that allowed them to move back into civilization while staying fairly functional in less than three months. But I haven't seen everything.

This is all so crazy, and so far outside the range of anything I've ever heard of before that who knows what to expect?

True enough though, that it would be very good to have some assistance out in the GFD.

I put in my share of being so zonked-out immobilized. Some punks waltzed right into my truck and stole my CD's while I was semi-comatose groggified.

-Erik (2010)

**SWEATING**

I've heard a few reports of people who thought they were allergic to themselves, particularly to their own sweat.

What if it isn't an allergy but a response to toxins?

Toxins which are not metabolized or broken down, but excreted intact?

Such as through the sweat glands?

And what if the allergists are unaware of this because they lack the diagnostic tools to assess toxin-induced activation of immune response?

-Erik (2006)

*

That was one of the weird things we noticed during the Incline Village CFS epidemic...that we had become "allergic" to our own sweat.

I don't recall checking for color.

But reacting to sweat didn't strike me as being quite so bizarre as just breathing on something and having it turn bad.
That still happens to a mild extent when I spend too long in a bad place, so it seems suggestive that exhalation might be an unappreciated avenue of detox.

-Erik (2009)

*

During the Tahoe outbreak, people had brown sweat and became allergic to their own perspiration.

We had never seen anything like this. But it didn't take rocket science to reach the conclusion that we must be expelling something really bad through sweating.

-Erik (2015)

MORE SYMPTOMS

> Did you feel worse when you were detoxing mold? Did your arms and legs ever feel weak?

Weak? Some mornings I thought for sure that the circulation had been cut off beyond the point of no return: totally cold and dead.

I had peripheral necrosis that looked like frostbite.

I had many scary hours trying to regain circulation and believing that I might be facing amputation. Dr. Shoemaker writes in Mold Warriors that some people weren't so lucky as to keep all their toes.

Dr. Cheney noted this anomaly in the curious loss of fingerprints that some of us had.

-Erik (2006)

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The dead arms were particularly frightening to me.

There were times when I was certain they were really dead, and had to spend an hour trying to get enough blood back in so I could make my hands work.

-Erik (2008)

*
The depression response is an excellent indicator of detox.

-Erik (2008)

*

The complications after gall bladder surgery should have been a clue to doctors that an avenue of detox had just been removed.

I was amazed at the black-gunk-in-the-poop when I detoxed. I could correlate the same feeling as being in a mold exposure to what was coming out.

Asked a local surgeon whether he had encountered this phenomenon, and he said that in twenty years of various intestinal operations, he had never seen anything such as I describe and was quite certain that it did not exist.

So what am I supposed to think? My memory tells me that I saw it.

-Erik (2008)

*

You know, it's funny that when I was living in a mold zone ten years ago, I kept having nightmares that all my teeth were falling out.

I got out to the desert and numerous abscesses lit up like crazy, then just went away.

So I agree that this seems to be a detox rather than just a progressive dental problem.

I started watching for this weirdness in people who I perceive to be living in bad places.

It seems to be pretty consistent, as I've seen others describe it many times.

-Erik (2008)

*

The fingers would swell up like balloons too. What fun we have with this illness, watching our bodies do weird things!

I am certain the fingers swelling is a detox sign. I have taken other Moldies on hikes in pristine areas and observed simultaneous swelling.
After many months of concerted avoidance, it stopped happening completely. And it has not recurred in years and years.

-Erik (2008)

**DETOX THERAPIES**

I did the detox and bought my own HealthMate FIR years ago and I wish I'd stopped listening to doctors and done it sooner.

-Erik (2003)

*

The CSM/bile binding salts have the proper molecular weight for biotoxin binding and transport.

Psyllium is probably a good thing but people have tried it for many years without addressing the illness.

-Erik (2004)

*

Of all the weird therapies I’ve heard, the ionic foot baths seem to “speak” better than the rest. I haven’t tried it, but the reports I’ve heard have been very impressive.

-Erik (2008)

*

I thought that Ultra Clear was about the best thing for me, when blazing into detox mode.

-Erik (2008)

*

I got a FIR sauna, and true to form, it only worked if it was in a totally pristine place.

Using it in a bad neighborhood only made things worse. I have to get clear for detox to occur.
I reluctantly decided that the only way to really sweat it out was to do it the old fashioned way:

Out in nature, hiking, biking, kayaking, climbing, working, getting wood etc.

(You know..."torture" compared to sitting in a moldy house, trying to sweat myself to health.)

-Erik (2010)

IONOPHORES

Detox regimens are easy to understand for some toxins, but others are a bit more complex.

Ionophores don't conform to the concepts of classical toxicology. They don't need to enter the cell to do damage, nor are they metabolized and broken down for excretion - except through the anion organic transport system, which is very limited in its capacity.

Think of Ciguatoxin as a model - how it moves up through the food chain because it is permanently sequestered in the tissues of large fish.

-Erik (2008)

*

Another good reason to take a shower is to remove the salt from the skin and lower the epidermal conductivity.

I think the static correlates better to efficiency of detox than inefficiency.

My mother is not affected by mold, but after I discern a plume going through and as I am suffering from the aftereffects, her wristwatch stops.

We've watched this happen over and over again, like clockwork.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 27

Exercise

EXERCISE INTOLERANCE

Dr. Cheney was worried that people would become deconditioned, but attempts to stand up set a pretty strict limitation on what you could do.

Being able to participate in any sports or physical activity was completely off the table - gone.

But as we saw wild variations develop in people’s illness, it became pretty clear that the way individuals were affected was so unpredictable that we couldn’t necessarily rule someone out of CFS just because they were able to exercise or think at odd times while not at others.
It's like the weirdness of being so slammed during times of weather change. It just seems to make no sense at all unless you know what is causing it.

All of us in Incline could be easily discerned even at a distance because we literally staggered with a peculiar and distinctive gait from places where we could sit to another place where we could lean or sit again.

Nobody could stand unaided for long, let alone walk fast or run. We couldn't hide our condition if we ventured out. Anyone could spot us.

When someone is clearly suffering with something that sounds really similar, I hate to say, "Your description doesn't fit," but the inability to exercise or tolerate the aftereffects was the absolute hallmark of CFS.

Or at least, CFS as it was in the beginning.

-Erik (2006)

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One of the hallmarks of CFS was the "push-crash" phenomenon.

Overdoing is not benign and without deleterious consequences.

Dr. Cheney wrestled with this problem, as CFS'ers tended to be some of the most motivated people on the planet, and would go out and hurt themselves over and over - until painful experience taught a hard lesson that certain limits are exceeded at peril.

So he recommended moderate exercise when one feels able, but take care not to push beyond an artificial benchmark or goal if the effort is too depleting.

GET is almost a diagnostic of whether one understands CFS, because the waxing and waning variability of CFS means that GET is inappropriate, inadvisable, and unreasonable.

There are times when one simply cannot improve on what they have already done.

Thinking that GET is appropriate is an indication that one thinks the fatigue is of the normal variety, which CFS is not.

Pacing, meaning "Do what you can, when you can," is the safe and sane approach that most have adopted, because GET was out of the question.

-Erik (2006)

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We all had good days and tried to hit a peak of exercise capacity, only to relapse and pay for it horribly.

We wouldn't have thrown ourselves into crushing agony trying to exercise if we were intent on avoiding exercise.

That's what put me in shock when I found something that allowed me to exercise without crashing. This was like a damned miracle.

So unheard of was it, for someone of our group to predictably exercise, that people take the miracle that I exploited as proof that I couldn't possibly have "the real deal" and was only included as a "lesser case," a fluke, or an outright mistake.

For the CFS that I saw, graded exercise was absolutely impossible, and there was almost nothing we could do to convince people we weren't lying about this.

Other doctors in the community attacked Dr. Cheney and Dr. Peterson for their belief in this abnormality and supporting us when we insisted that this exercise intolerance wasn't something we could work through or overcome with willpower.

Obviously I am not against exercising, and if improvement were impossible, I wouldn't have pictures of myself on Mt. Whitney.

But if CFS'ers are forced to attempt graded exercise, the remitting relapsing nature of the illness make sticking to a program of constant increase a virtual impossibility.

This forces them to monitor their own activity and only do "pacing."

-Erik (2007)

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This illness turned athletes into couch potatoes literally overnight.

These were people who enjoyed nothing better than the mountain biking, tennis, marathon running, swimming lifestyle, and all the other stuff that was stolen by this illness.

The exercise intolerance is totally dictated and mediated by immune parameters of illness. If being in good shape didn't ward it off, what basis is there to believe that once a person has been disabled for long periods, somehow the duration of illness has changed the situation?
A "deconditioned" marathon runner is still probably in better shape after a year of lying in bed than most people will ever be.

-Erik (2008)

CLEAR PLACES

The peculiar difference between feel-good and feel-bad locations was that the post-exertional malaise and immune paralysis just didn’t seem to happen.

It is only the confused doctors who think CFS has anything to do with deconditioning.

I never really got out of shape.

All I had to do is pursue the effect of staying away from feel-bad places, and my "deconditioning" vanished.

-Erik (2008)

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> So apart from making sure that you’re in a good location and not carrying the response, are there other things that you do prior to exercise to make sure that your immune system is damped down?

Nada.

-Erik (2008)

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I now can run without fear of crashing, and have ridden my bike around Lake Tahoe.

But it took months before I could do aerobic exercise.

I started out barely able to make it to the end of the block, but gradually improved.

Then I climbed all kinds of mountains. The more I did, the better I got. But only if I hadn't had a serious setback by staying too long in mold zones.

That's when "The Power Curve" came into play.

This wasn't "Graded Exercise Therapy," for I was not really out of shape or deconditioned.
It was improving my aerobic threshold of tolerance.

-Erik (2010)

**EPO PULSE**

I'd been using altitude gain based on the sheer experience of having it help, but had no idea why that might be until Dr. Shoemaker wondered why this helped me.

He found that pushing the aerobic threshold only slightly without going anaerobic causes a pulse release of erythropoietin (epo), which damps down inflammatory cytokines and calms immune over response down.

Dr. Shoemaker calls it, "Going to the Erythropoietin Heights."

I have to exercise at a very controlled rate and be careful not to go anaerobic to get the results.

It's not the altitude. It's the shift in altitude that pushes the anaerobic threshold and releases a pulse of epo.

The pulse appears to last, but I don't know the specific effects on VEGF since I've never been tested.

Low or high altitude makes no difference. It's the push to a higher altitude from wherever you are.

I never had to move from Incline to take advantage of this. I started out by doing my maximum walk: the length of a driveway.

It is not the simple fact of living at a particular altitude that induces epo release. It's the barometric pressure shift to lower air pressure from high altitude which pushes the cells closer to the anaerobic threshold.

Even if the Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF) remains elevated by reprogramming, the epo pulse does not and is only temporarily released in a pulse by hypoxia.

Any beneficial effects are quickly overcome by re-exposure to biotoxins. The epo is just one part of the protocol.

Epo is natural. Procrit is the drug. I do not use the two terms interchangeably.
I never did any Procrit.

-Erik (2005)

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Shoemaker states:

"There is more good news about epo. Since the genes for VEGF and epo are both linked, that means that production of both is linked. When we see simultaneously normal levels of epo in blood and low VEGF, there is a gene transcription problem. Why does this matter? For some patients, the use of epo as a supplement can override what is called 'transcription block,' can boost VEGF as well. For these patients, a short course of epo 'resets' the genes, defeats the block and there is no fall in VEGF after the epo pulse therapy is over. Those patients return to health and maintain that improvement."

The epo is pulsed, the VEGF reprogramming is the result.

But the process can be overcome by re-exposure to the offending irritant that incites the inflammatory response.

Dr. Shoemaker uses Actos to calm down this response to keep the inflammatory response modulated in order for the epo reprogramming to be effective, while the cholestyramine to furthers this by adsorbing the recirculating toxins released by the shift in leptin signaling.

I accomplish this by removing all traces of the inflammatory irritant before inducing an epo pulse by whatever amount of exercise begins to push the anaerobic threshold, and maintain this state without going completely anaerobic.

I believe this is why GET is moderately effective in some people and completely destructive in others. It all depends on the level of inflammatory response before an attempt to induce epo is made.

It's the luck of the draw. People who are in an area of lesser toxins are allowed to reprogram VEGF while those in an inflammatory state demolish their Krebs cycle and crash.

I took the chance out of the equation by monitoring the inflammatory response during GET, and it paid off.

It's made an amazing difference for me.

-Erik (2005)
There is a contrast in your statement from Shoemaker's in that he states that some patients maintain this improvement after the short course of EPO. Don't forget that little clause: "in some patients."

Those "some patients" are the ones who don't have the HLA-DR mold susceptible genes.

For those that do, once they are primed for an inflammatory response, a biotoxin re-exposure to the many sick buildings scattered around will drive us back under the power curve of immune response. For us, the effect does not last under those circumstances.

I trained myself to detect subtleties of mycotoxin exposure and do whatever it takes to control the inflammatory response in order for the epo pulse to have effect.

“Whatever it takes” means extreme avoidance which is far more complicated than one would think, since any contaminated possession brought into a safe place can still be a driving force in the inflammatory response.

-Erik (2005)

It turns out that allergists in the 1950s were quite familiar with altitude therapy and recommended going to the mountains, but Dr. Shoemaker is actively seeking the reasons which allow refinement of the concept.

It's nice to have validation for an effect that most doctors are quick to say is nothing more than a relaxing break from normal life.

-Erik (2005)

Forget elevation as an indicator for locations. Mold grows at all altitudes.

This is a very complicated deal.

There is a strange correlation to altitude. If you read *Mold Warriors*, Dr. Shoemaker talks about the "altitude induced release of erythropoietin," which damps down the inflammatory response and protects the blood-brain barrier.
But this damping can be easily overwhelmed if you are not clear.

-Erik (2006)

There are anecdotal reports that CFS patients living on mountains do better. My experience indicates that altitude per se has nothing to do with it. It is the shift in altitude which induces epo release.

I can do this down at Mount Diablo just as effectively as Mt. Whitney.

I sincerely doubt that this effect can be duplicated by merely breathing if one is not increasing altitude at the time.

It sounds like hypobaric chambers may be worth a try, although the trials I've seen so far don't seem to equal the descriptions of those who have done the altitude/location shift.

-Erik (2007)

The epo pulse appears to be a transitory response to pushing the anaerobic threshold. Staying at altitude allows eventual equilibrium.

I would go out and deliberately push myself to the limit of comfortable aerobic capacity and then increase altitude while maintaining the effect by adjusting pacing.

What I found was that I absolutely must be free of any inflammatory response before and during the exercise. If I walked through a spore plume, I would crash and suffer if I were to continue.

Sometimes I would be just sufficiently contaminated to make the choice very difficult to turn around and go to all the trouble of decontaminating and starting over, but I finally learned how important it was.

Bitter experience taught me not to mess around with this. It was absolutely necessary that the immune system be damped down or the exercise would be Counterproductive, spelled with a capital "C"rash.

-Erik (2008)
It's not the altitude. It's the shift in altitude, so the start point doesn't matter. What I mean is that it doesn't matter if the start point of the exertion is at higher or lower altitude.

I've gotten the same type of epo pulse starting at sea level (Mt. Diablo) as I did when starting at 10,000 feet (Mt. Whitney or Wheeler Peak).

Dr. Shoemaker says it's so dramatic because the epo pulse significantly lowers cerebral inflammation.

It seems to be mainly the shift while maintaining an almost anaerobic state that does it. Sometimes in as little at 300 foot vertical gain.

I take my exertion up to the point of almost being unable to carry on a conversation, and then go whatever speed allows me to continue a conversation without being breathless. No matter how slow that is.

The trick was to find hills that match where I am on the power curve and that allow a comfortable ascension at precisely this rate.

When I first started out, doing this, "level" was all I could handle.

Then I started getting better.

-Erik (2008)

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I tricked my body into thinking it was increasing altitude by...increasing altitude.

I lived near the top of Village Blvd, and every day, I went up to the scenic turnout overlooking Incline Village.

It was amazing. There was "something" about doing this increase in altitude that really helped.

I wasn’t the only Incliner doing this, either.

I found others who stumbled over the same effect, and we ran into each other while out practicing it.

It had to be a steady increase in altitude or it didn't work.

I tried this at various elevations, and going to a lower one ruined the effect. It had to be a steady increase from whatever altitude you are accustomed to.
It was really weird.

You had to breathe at the exact threshold of just barely starting to push the aerobic threshold, but not go beyond. Definitely not go beyond, or pay for it with a crash.

If I could maintain precisely this balance for about 30 minutes a day, the effects were near miraculous.

It made a difference in "push/crash" when nothing else made a dent.

-Erik (2009)

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Sometimes I ignored Dr. Cheney's advice and tried to "push through it."

This didn't work out so well, and I had repeated crashes and relapses.

But what could I do? Doing nothing was doing nothing.

I decided to keep trying even if it killed me.

And that's when I noticed that, occasionally, there were times that I didn't crash.

Since my movements were so limited, I could reproduce exactly what I was doing when I didn't crash.

I tried doing exactly the same thing again. Remarkably, I again didn't crash.

Or at least I crashed so much less than I would at other times that this gave me an "effect" - a promising direction in which to push my thinking to get maximum benefit.

I had no words for this, so I just called it "an effect."

The point was to reach and maintain a very precise level of breathing while ascending upwards from whatever altitude you are accustomed to.

Although I was working on increasing my range, which started out at half a block, this was not Graded Exercise Therapy.

I was aiming at a specific type of breathing for a controlled duration.

This resulted in additional exercise tolerance. It looked like graded exercise to them, so it looked to others as if I was accomplishing this through sheer will power. But honestly, GET has nothing to do with this.
Since I couldn't persuade people to believe it until they had a logical rationale that accounts for its existence, we've been waiting for someone like Dr. Cheney to connect his observations of impaired VO2 max with an actual breathing mechanism which might put their science together with the "dumb luck" experience of those of us who tripped over this by sheer trial and error.

-Erik (2009)

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The increase in altitude challenges the pulmonary system in exactly the right way to induce an anti-inflammatory pulse of erythropoietin, which helps calm down the immune system and restore blood-brain-barrier integrity.

I started at about three hundred feet of gain.

I correlate my pace to that in which I can still maintain a conversational speaking ability. If breath becomes more labored, slow down until conversationalism is restored.

Stay at that speed. I would do this every day and increase my altitude-distance as I felt more energy.

But here's the trick. I had to be utterly free of mold, and could not encounter any of it during this exercise. One small hit and it's all over. Any further exertion would knock me out and I would crash afterward.

Successful completion of the exercise could only be done in a completely pristine environment.

-Erik (2011)
Chapter 28

Cholestyramine

GETTING DAMPED DOWN

In order for CSM to work, the body must first release the sequestered toxins by damping down the inflammatory response, which controls the toxin release by leptin signaling.

CSM is wasted otherwise, and it’s not an easy therapy either!

This leads some people to the conclusion that the therapy just plain doesn’t work, which sounds reasonable but perhaps is not necessarily correct.

People should probably not waste their time and money on books and tests unless they are willing to undertake a difficult and arduous approach that has no guarantee of
success and depends greatly upon the individual’s efforts, which require far more than just ingesting powder.

Dr. Shoemaker’s protocol is an easy one to fail if done incorrectly.

- Erik (2005)

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Dr. Shoemaker does employ some corrective chemotherapies, but I cannot overemphasize enough that these cannot take the place of an avoidance strategy.

The extreme danger is that attempting to overcome continued mold exposure by resorting to drugs will make the therapy appear ineffective and create more damage.

Cholestyramine (CSM) can and does help while in a bad environment, but it only helps scrub toxins after they have passed through after the fact. So any resolution is only a partial alleviation of the problem.

- Erik (2009)

**TRYING CSM**

CSM wasn't around when I started mold avoidance.

I did try doxy in 1999 and CSM in 2001, but the relief I get from avoiding mycotoxins is so much better than anything else that I just concentrated on extreme avoidance alone.

- Erik (2005)

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If you read *Mold Warriors* carefully, it tells you straight out that this toxin binding CSM is limited, only scrubbing toxins that have already passed through your system.

If the CSM can't scrub faster than the rate of mycotoxin exposure, it's not going to do much. The key is, if you are a Moldie, to keep exposure level below the point at which CSM has a chance to be effective.

In 2001 I moved into a place that put me below the power curve of long term exposure, more than I could endure.

Wasn't all that ferocious, not like walking into a sick building, but this adds up over time. I could tell that I was gradually slipping and heading in a very bad direction.
CSM only scrubs toxins after they've passed through and done their damage. It's like cleaning up after the hurricane. It doesn't really protect you in the midst of the storm. For people on the edge, it helps a lot by keeping the mess a bit better under control, but as long as the mess keeps piling up, eventually you're gonna get buried.

I did try the CSM at that time, and it did seem to help, just a bit, but my digestive tract came to a screaming halt.

I finally decided that I had had enough and just concentrated on total avoidance - and that's all I do.

-Erik (2006)

**CSM EXPLANATION**

>>I do not think the body is unable to eliminate neurotoxins, I think CSM is mostly symptomatic treatment.

Well, just look at Ciguatoxin poisoning, for example.

The toxins build up in the food chain and are concentrated in the tissues of the larger fish? (Don't eat the big 'uns.)

Not an infection, just an accumulation of toxins from ingesting other fish who have been exposed to the dinoflagellates and absorbed their toxins.

-Erik (2005)

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>> Why do you think it is that some of us are able to basically go about our business after being so sick, while for others only extreme avoidance allows them to be healthy?

Dr. Shoemaker explains this most eloquently in Desperation Medicine. It is the dissociation constant of toxin release from receptors.

This is not solely a question of toxic dose from exposure to toxins outside the body. Biotoxin illness is mediated by whether sufficient upregulation occurs to disturb the equilibrium of the ion gradient that keeps the ionophore toxins bound to their receptors in the fat cells in a "molecular bear trap."

This is a process that can be visualized by thinking of osmosis, except that instead of water molecules responding to disparity of solute concentrations, dissociation of toxins is based on electrostatic principles of attraction.
CSM can soak up enough recirculating toxins to cause dissociation.

The sudden release of endogenous toxins causes an inflammatory cascade which increases the level of cytokines so dramatically that the intensification reaction can be more damaging than an exposure to a toxic building. If someone with the double dreaded mold gene goes through this intensification, they have the most extreme form of metabolic inadequacy to clear these recirculating toxins.

To understand what separates the fundamental mechanism of biotoxin mediated responses that are upstream of genetic HLA variables, you must read "Solving the Herxheimer" in Desperation Medicine.

-Erik (2006)

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By lowering the levels of recirculated toxins in the intestines, the osmotic imbalance can induce a dissociation response as the toxins try to leave the fat cells, which makes you feel worse when the toxins are reentered into the bloodstream.

-Erik (2007)

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The body is in a self-protective feedback loop controlled by leptin.

The sudden drop in "perceived toxin levels" in the intestines tricked the body into thinking it was safe to release more from the tissues.

It wasn't until the surge of toxins in the blood revealed itself as being over tolerance that it was able to respond by shutting down leptin, but by then, the cytokine storm was already underway.

If you aren't on the verge, you can withstand more toxin release.

The way people who crash at first from a ridiculously small amount but can increase it later seems to be consistent with the concept that this toxin storing idea can take you right up to the edge, after which a measure of involuntary toxin release is mandated for survival.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 29

Construction

“MOLD-FREE” HOUSING

My experience is that the most toxic molds are heavily reliant upon substrate and conditions to produce the specific toxins that bother me, and that controlling these conditions neutralizes toxic properties even if mold growth is still present.

I refuse to go nuts worrying about all mold. Mold is natural and necessary to life on this planet. It is only the toxin producers that require my attention.

I think that the real recipe for disaster is not so much what mold on a wood structure does just while growing on that wood as what the mold is capable of doing when condensation in the walls combines with the mold’s access to the paper backing on fiberglass insulation and “mold-preloaded” wallboard.

I take issue with the entire concept of reducing relative humidity in the middle of a room to prevent mold. This does nothing to prevent moisture at the condensation interface on the exterior of the walls.

You see this even out in the desert where the relative humidity is lower than one could ever achieve in a humid climate with even the most powerful dehumidifiers.
Open up enough walls and you will see this effect for yourself. Look on the north "cold" walls of houses where the paper backing has been reversed to the outer wall and you will see that the enhanced mold growth correlates to the area of greatest condensation potential, often enough to confirm the basic concept that the building design lends itself to disaster.

And if one provides mold with the proper ingredients at that vapor interface of semi-decomposed cellulose in the form of paper backing, the mold will take full advantage of the opportunity.

The "vapor barrier" is a rotten idea when the vapor is encouraged to form in the exact location on the ideal material that mold utilizes to produce potentiated toxins.

-Erik (2005)

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The problematic mold is almost never growing somewhere that it can be easily destroyed by spraying something on it. The mold hides inside walls and in dark damp places under foundations.

Regardless of whether the spores from these hidden colonies dry up and die, the toxin will remain toxic. Killing it doesn't matter.

Moldy spots in bathrooms and on window sills only are indicative of a mold infestation somewhere else. Killing this mold solves nothing.

-Erik (2009)

**PRE-MOLDED MATERIALS**

The way mold explodes out of sheetrock in multiple sealed walls made me believe that the mold is actually incorporated into the sheetrock. Using poor quality decomposed wood contaminated with mold to make the paper on sheetrock would give the mold ample water to sporulate and lie dormant until it gets a consistent water supply.

My sensitivity convinced me that there was mold behind a shower, so I cut a square out of the green board. Sure enough, there it was.

This is a three year old house in perfect visible condition, so the contractor couldn't believe it until I showed it to him. His response was, "Holy shit!"

All the new houses I see are built with the sink and shower tiles glued directly to green board.
I took a plastic bag and some water to a new house where the sheetrock has just been nailed up. I took some samples and put them directly into some water (in a plastic bag to prevent cross contamination). Within a week, the backing on the green board was covered with mold. The standard sheetrock looks okay.

Since the green board is the one that will be in contact with water should the tile grout fail, the incorporation of mold is the worst possible scenario.

It's a simple experiment. Find a house under construction and do it yourself.

-Erik (2001)

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I walked around various construction sites and picked up sheetrock samples which I dropped directly into a plastic ziplock bag with a little distilled water.

All the samples exploded with mold.

The mold didn't start at one corner and spread across. It literally erupted equally across the entire sample.

The green board was the worst. The green side that is supposed to be mold resistant did okay, but the opposite side sprouted mold like crazy. I can't see what good green board is supposed to be when the water can go right through to the side that isn't mold resistant.

It looks to me like mold is processed right into the paper backing on sheetrock.

-Erik (2002)

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Some of these homes are moldy right down to the frames.

I spoke with contractors several years ago and they said, "It's not our fault. The wood is not what it used to be. We have to work with what we've got, and it's just impossible to get good kiln-dried wood the way it used to be. We're just doing our jobs."

Imagine all those brand new mold castles out there.

Imagine living next to them.

Imagine living downwind of an entire neighborhood of them.

-Erik (2006)
NEW CONSTRUCTION

I find that new construction is even more likely to be mold ridden than old.

They built a new library in Incline Village. The old one was fine. The new one has sucked, from the first day they opened the doors. While under construction, they messed up and it snowed before the roof was done.

-Erik (2008)

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North of Reno in Spanish Springs, a brand new community has sprung up in the bottom the valley. Complete with Starbucks, Home Depot, the works, many new shops, hundreds of nice new buildings... in a flood plain that has no outlet.

Long time Reno-ites drive past and remember when the whole area was inundated and ask, "What are they thinking?" and "Whose brilliant idea was this?"

We’re having a dry spell out here. Nothing has happened yet, but the old timers have no doubt that it will.

-Erik (2008)

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One of my Moldie friends was searching for better housing and toured a brand new subdivision that was still under construction. She went into a house that had just been sheetrocked, and felt sufficiently hit that the place was instantly deemed unacceptable.

Out of curiosity, she checked out the places that hadn't been sheetrocked yet and found enough mold on the wood that she felt such a place would never be safe for her.

She said, "I couldn't live here if you gave me one of these houses."

-Erik (2008)

METAL BUILDINGS

I like the metal buildings with cement floors, hangar style.

They are getting quite good and even look like regular homes now.
They understand thermal bridging and can control for a fair degree of heat loss through proper insulation.

If I were to erect a permanent structure, I would choose a metal building.

But as I've found, if my neighbor is letting out a ripping spore plume, it negates the whole point. So it would have to be fairly isolated to be really trustworthy.

-Erik (2005)

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I've lived in airplane hangars and they're wonderful, but they are difficult to keep warm.

The problems of thermal bridging of metal framework are enormous in a cold climate.

Airstream trailers are notorious for their condensation problems. The metal frame will channel enough cold through the wall to cause condensation and mold growth on interior panels.

There was a flat roof school with a dropped acoustic tile ceiling whose Stachy growth was fed by the metal straps conducting cold down from the roof. It wasn't even leaking.

To keep the metal parts from simply conducting the cold right through the insulation, the metal parts need to be separated by a thermal insulator. I used an interesting corrugated plastic panel called Coroplast.

But this is compensating for a problem you wouldn't have if you built using the Amvicsystem.

http://www.amvicsystem.com/

I still like metal buildings in a warm climate, but I would go the extra expense for Amvicsystem in a cold one.

-Erik (2006)

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>Do you have any experience with metal buildings?

Yes, I felt great in a hangar until a darn compost farm business got started a quarter mile away.

It blasted the whole area.
All the people for a half mile started having "strange complaints."

One day I was sitting in a restaurant and overheard a guy doing an interview for a prospective business manager to run someone’s business for him, because of failing health.

It was the compost farm owner.

Just guess what his complaints sounded like!

-Erik (2006)

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A lot of old places have condensation areas of micro-niches which will support Stachy, but a viable spore just hasn't made it there yet.

A funky trailer or old building full of leaks that is not in a plume can go forever with no Stachy.

A brand new building that has one slight condensation problem but is being bombed by a plume will have Stachy growth as soon as a viable spore arrives and finds what it needs.

It's a case of opportunity meets conditions.

I was surprised at the number of metal buildings in an industrial area which were intolerable, despite appearing to have few areas suitable for growth.

It looks like those few areas are more than enough, if the entire area is being sporadically plumed with viable spores.

-Erik (2006)

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With some insulation and heating modifications, a shed would be awesome.

-Erik (2015)

**SHIPPING CONTAINERS**

The only thing the shipping container is replacing is the studs and joists.
I see wood siding, windows, insulation, sheetrock and all the stuff that is part of a normal house.

Looks to me like it would be more expensive and harder to build, since you need to work around all that metal.

And since you need something to hold up the sheetrock, I guess it isn't even replacing studs and joists.

I don't get it.

I would never do this.

It is too easy to frame up a place using metal studs.

-Erik (2015)

**CONDENSATION INTERFACE**

Remember the last time you were doing something outdoors on a sizzling hot day and got a cold canned drink out of the cooler? No matter how hot and dry the weather, that can would blaze forth with condensation.

Well, houses in the desert are like that. If it's really cold outside and you've got the heat on, moisture will form at the condensation interface, particularly on the north-facing wall.

No matter what the relative humidity, it's gonna happen.

And if mold finds suitable substrate at that niche of unavoidable moisture, it's going to thrive! The paper backing on insulation is perfect. One often finds a hidden colony right at that narrow area that is just right for mold survival.

The only reason the toxic types of mold haven't grown there in the past is that it takes a viable spore to find that niche before anything can get going.

Well, these certain types of mold are now being blown around on the wind in a geometric progression as mold begets more mold.

The more sourcepoints, the more plumes there are. The more plumes there are, the more chances these viable spores have to make new sourcepoints.

Years ago we had medical building under construction in Reno that had the walls being sheetrocked before the roof was finished, and it rained. This was a multistory building and the top floor instantly lit up with Stachy in multiple places.
Seems to me this is good evidence that there is another sick building or zone nearby and that while the storm was going on, it was raining viable spores onto that top floor.

This particular situation was detected and corrected. Usually it isn't, and they just paint over the problem.

-Erik (2008)

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A surprising number of houses are constructed with the paper backing on the fiberglass facing outwards.

"Wrong side out" must be a labor saving technique, but has the very unfortunate consequence of placing the paper (perfect substrate) in the condensation interface.

This creates a hidden mold reservoir that is very difficult to locate, as it doesn't require any water leaks to keep mold growth active.

It’s often found on the cold side - the north-facing wall.

-Erik (2008)

**VENTILATION**

Many brand new ventilation systems installed in moldy environments give instant hits that mold responders associate with cycles of operation.

Disturbance of spores creates an increase in neurotoxic exposure that sensitive people can easily detect.

This is one of the clues that indicates that spore counting is inherently flawed in assessing mycotoxin exposure.

Every mold responder who experiences the hit differential from a ventilation system that does not contain mold growth can clearly feel that although the ambient average of spores remains an average constant, the exacerbation of symptoms from conditions of mycotoxin release through aerodynamic forces changes the level of neurotoxic exposure dramatically.

There is simply no comparison between the symptoms from ambient levels of spores and the exacerbation from the same amounts of spores which have been subjected to change in velocity.
You don't require scientific analysis to validate this anomaly. You can feel it.

-Erik (2006)

Las Vegas is full of bad buildings that have toxic molds growing on nothing more than the organic debris in heating and air conditioning ductwork.... which is steel.

The dust sticks to the metal ductwork, and the condensation supplies the rest.

-Erik (2008)

**VAPOR BARRIER**

Vapor barrier is another word for "condensation trap"

Don't think for a moment that mold toxins from the happy colonies underneath can't come right up from around the edges.

Increase ventilation as necessary to decrease humidity.

Dehumidifiers and space heaters (watch the carbon monoxide - have to be out of the place) can help temporarily, but the best solutions are long term solutions.

After a while, people forget, the machine breaks, etc.

-Erik (2015)

**INSULATION**

I once read an article about “blown-in insulation” that was provided free of charge to low-income housing.

A lot of people took advantage of this service.

It turned out that the materials, which included old newspapers that they were shredding, were moldy prior to processing.

I got to see some of this stuff.

It didn't matter how good it looked. It was still bad.
Some of these places had to have the material sucked back out under Hazmat protocols because it was making people ill.

If I remember correctly, the cellulose was moldy at the time of shredding and, of course, the toxins remained, although there was no mold growth after processing.

-Erik (2006)

**SEWERS**

Millions of houses are built with shower tiles glued directly to sheetrock.

There have always been mold free alternatives to this. It was a bad construction technique that is affecting huge numbers of people.

Daily use of the shower and capillary action in the grout keeps the mold supplied with the perfect rate of water flow.

But the damage doesn't stop inside the house.

When the spores are flushed into sewer systems and the mold grows on toilet paper and sludge, the air vents that are distributed along the sewer main can serve as the source of spore plumes that will knock a sensitive person flat.

If the back pressure from the main drain is so great that it resists plugging and there is mold in the sewer, you could raze, burn, bulldoze, rebuild and still be right back in mold infested hell.

I went nuts trying to get all the mold out of a house until I discovered that I felt bad outside, even when I was upwind of the house.

I finally correlated my symptoms with wind direction and it pointed right at the sewer.

There wasn't much I could do about that but move.

-Erik (2002)

**SHEETROCK**

> My contractor has waterproof sheetrock available.

Yes, and they will certainly sell it to you whether it does you any good or not.
Even if they know it is unlikely to do you any good.

The sheetrock is completely immaterial to the point. I would have no problem at all with putting plain old ordinary sheetrock in my house.

It's kind of like a news segment I saw on tests of fecal bacteria in ice that is served in restaurants.

The employees aren't washing their hands, they use their hands to grab ice, and the bacteria can survive in the icebox...so you wind up with bacteria in your ice.

The news anchors said, "I'll never get ice from a restaurant again."

Well, what about their drinking cups which were handled by that same employee? Their silverware, plates, food, doorknobs and everything else?

The ice is not the point. Getting the employees to wash their hands and control the bacteria is the real issue.

Not using ice isn't going to do anything about the same bacteria from anything except the ice.

So what's have they really accomplished by choosing not to use ice anymore? They took one piece of the premise and jumped to the wrong conclusion.

There is no problem with normal sheetrock. It's how that sheetrock is used.

-Erik (2009)

*

> Dragonboard is made in China and contains some amount of unspecified fiber, which is probably cellulose. It's also stored in a warehouse in Texas, because that is where the distributor is. Texas is known for having mold and pollution in the atmosphere. For a drywall alternative, I lean more toward Magnesiacore, which is solid magnesium cement and is made in Canada.

Funny how they don't tell you what the fiber is.

And I agree, since they don't mention what it is, then it's probably something inexpensive.

And cellulose is what they probably use, if they don't go out of their way to specify something else.
If that fiber were something that mold couldn't grow on, you'd think that they wouldn't forget to point that out.

-Erik (2009)

**MODULAR CONSTRUCTION**

I watched the Henness Flats apartment complex as it was being built.

It caught our attention for its unusual modular construction, so I would drive past to watch.

The modules were lifted into place by cranes.

But it was done in the winter, and got soaked before the roofs were in place.

Winter construction is perfectly normal here in Truckee. Most of the time, it is not a problem because the roof is built before the sheetrock is installed. It's all part of a well-proven plan.

People didn't think of mold as being harmful. Aspergillus on stud walls is considered normal and nothing to be feared.

When a house of normal construction dries out, the mold dries out and dies.

Nobody thought the modular construction would be any different.

Since I had mold experience from years before, I told others, "These people are going to be screwed"...but I was the only person who thought so. They thought I was crazy.

So I am absolutely convinced that people at Henness Flats never dreamed that this was going to be a problem.

-Erik (2008)

*

A local reporter went to do a story on the Henness Flats apartments and wound up staggering out of there, saying it made her sick.

It made a believer out of her.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 30

Remediation

REMEDIATION BASICS

>A few tips if you think mold may be a problem in your home. If you have a leak, make sure you get it fixed. Run fans and a dehumidifier.

Those are some good tips on how to really destroy your life and put the finishing touches on creating the ultimate mold disaster.

1. Fixing the leak reduces the gelatinous quality of the colony and creates the potential for more dried spores to become airborne.

2. Dehumidifying after the mold is already present makes this happen much faster.

3. Running the fans will spread the dried spores even further.

Once again, advice from the "experts" that is completely counterproductive.

- Erik (2004)
* Be wary of allowing anyone to disturb the mold colony, as this can release a vast increase in spores which would make the situation worse by several orders of magnitude.

Remediation of toxic mold must be performed by a knowledgeable person using Hazardous Materials protocols.

(Not your landlord with a fan.)

-Erik (2006)

* To the best of my knowledge, once spores are rendered fragmentary and non-viable, the relevant consideration for dead spores and fungal debris is the residual capacity to inflict pain upon a sensitized person.

An incautious remediation procedure can spread fungal detritus far and wide, turning an intolerable area into one that is semi life threatening to a mold susceptible individual.

It would behoove people considering this process to have a back-up plan for living accommodations.

-Erik (2008)

* When they got to work with the dozers on tearing down the Park Lane Mall, the area got three times worse.

My workplace was within the zone.

It was just like the mold in Truckee High School.

A lot of the "eh" type ... and a few killer sourcepoints that would give me seizures.

There's still a little in the theater.

Some of the rooms in there are still pretty bad.

But it is nothing like it was.

-Erik (2015)
REMOVING MOLD

As Chin Yang of P&K Microbiology Services said, "If the mold is Stachy, removal is the only option." He had good reasons for saying so.

If the colony is anything beyond miniscule, successfully killing Stachy without removal liberates an increased non-viable toxin load that poses the problem that whatever problems already exist possess the natural propensity to become far worse unless some mitigating factors interfere with the normal progression of dead-colony dispersion.

Thermapure is a dangerous option, if it is successful in killing a hidden toxin former:

"The operation was successful, but the patient died."

I absolutely agree with Chin Yang, as he is being extremely practical in terms of placing human health above misguided short-term economic concerns. Total removal is the only realistic means of achieving this goal. Anything less is false economy.

If a failed remediation eventually leads to total removal anyway, the cost of the inadequate remediation is totally wasted and all human illness induced in the interim can be added to the ultimate cost of not doing it right the first time.

In those partially treated buildings which give the impression that toxin potency has abated, the sequelae of chronic low level exposure is hidden but not absent. The suffering is deferred and the true cost will probably never be known, only suspected by the people who wonder why they and so many others who worked in the same place went on to develop various rare cancers, CFS, fibromyalgia, multiple chemical sensitivities and other mysterious illnesses which the medical profession is unable to explain.

What is my advice to people who cannot afford total removal?

To remove themselves from the premises, because although they won't see the price they will pay until later, they cannot afford not to.

-Erik (2007)

STACHY GROWTH

John Banta of Restoration Consultants in Sacramento told me that there is literally no house that does not have at least a few stray Stachy spores.

Two teachers at North Tahoe High School became chronically ill while working in a room that had a baseball diameter sized colony of Stachy.
The rest of the teachers in other areas believe that these teachers must be lying and malingering, since others in that school didn't all succumb.

The concept of ambient spore testing is meaningless when a sole plume in an isolated area can lash out and affect just a couple of people, leaving others in close proximity wondering what those complainers are whining about since it didn't do the same thing to everyone.

So yes, Stachy can be found in a building that isn't sick.

And there are many buildings which are quite safe except for one small area that can be quite exceptional in its effects.

-Erik (2006)

**REMEDIATING FOR MOLDIES**

>My new house was good, but now there is some mold growing. How can I remediate it when I can't even remediate a wooden chair that I like?

My experience and the concurrent anecdotes I've heard from others is that if an object is exposed on a long term basis to mycotoxins, it will build up a considerable charge of badness that may not go away for an unacceptably long time.

Things that have only momentary exposure which are of a nature that surface spores can be easily removed clean up with no problem.

But even hard plastic or wood that has been exposed long term has a long term effect on me despite any amount of remediation.

So if your chair was exposed long term, it can stay bad for a very long time. But if the wood structure of the house had a mold of lesser toxicity and lower duration of exposure, resolving the mold and preventing recurrence would probably suffice, at least for me.

But there are some caveats.

There is a point of no return to this immune inflammatory progression. Once a person has gone over the threshold, coming back takes actions of an extreme nature that are incomprehensible to anyone who has never been close to dropping into this living hell.

The question at this point is not whether any objective tests of the materials can point you at a proper course of action. It is whether you are at a point beyond which your reactivities will allow you to deal with the variables at hand.
These reactivities are of such specificity and variability that determining acceptable levels of contamination cannot be realistically assessed by any other person.

Learning to do this is very much like flying your own plane.

An experienced person could do it for you, but if you want to do it on your own, you have no other option but to rely on your own expertise and "fly or die" accordingly.

-Erik (2005)

*

I tried the fresh air supply from outdoors concept seven years ago and was dismayed and amazed when it totally didn't work.

It was only then that I went to the desert to get clear and then returned to test the exterior of my moldy house without going inside, and found that I was being plumed from a sewer vent that wasn't even on my property. There was absolutely nothing I could possibly do the make the area livable.

I could have burned the house completely, bulldozed the ground, and sterilized the property with napalm and it wouldn't have done one damn bit of good.

I debated the ethics of selling the house, but I didn't create the problem, I didn't contaminate the neighborhood, and certainly nobody helped me in any way. They all were willing to fight me to the death while I was struggling for my life.

Nobody would have believed me anyway, so I sold it and bailed out.

-Erik (2006)

*

I'm not saying that everyone needs to bail out at the slightest hint of mold or that remediation can't be successful.

But there will come a day when you will walk into someone’s house, and they will tell you that they have been dealing with it very well and maybe even have successfully remediated....and despite their assurances that they know what they are doing and are in control of the situation, you will look at them and see the signs of illness and know exactly where they are heading.

-Erik (2006)

*
Think you'll ever feel completely safe again, in a place that beat you up so hard, no matter how much you clean it? Won't it be always in the back of your mind, "I wonder if there's still some left" and "How much better might I be if I were somewhere else?"

The way I see it, if a possession or object from your mold castle picks up a toxin potential that hurts you later - whether in storage, new house, wherever - no matter how much you try and remediate that object, the place where it came from is no less likely to retain that some potential. Surely one cannot address an entire house with the same concerted effort that is applied to that one bad object.

If the perception of badness from an object taken to a different location is apparent to you, then you are at a level of reactivity that means the house itself will certainly do no less.

That makes "remediation" a testable proposition. If you can't successfully remediate to your own satisfaction each and every object taken from a bad place, you won't be able to free the house from having that same effect.

-Erik (2008)

*

I had stuff that I put in well-ventilated storage out in the Godforsakenhotterthanhell desert north of Reno finally die down after five years of cooking in a hot metal storage unit.

So if all further mold contamination at that house had been halted, and we reproduced the one hundred and fifty degree temperatures of that desert storage unit for the entire house, we can guess that the house had no potential to become safe for me in anything less than that five year span no matter how well ventilated it was.

-Erik (2009)

*

> My moldy house made me very sick. I am having it torn down and a new one built to replace it. How can I decrease the likelihood the mold won't come back?

Some locations require that a significant layer of topsoil be removed to reduce the chances of another go-round with mold.

Your concern about what will surely penetrate into the ground when the house is demolished is enough to warrant action.
If the issue of ground contamination is not resolved to your satisfaction, what peace of mind will you ever have in your new house when lingering doubts come back to haunt you in the night?

Especially when there is a fairly easy way to remove them, if you do so before construction begins?

For that alone, I recommend removing and replacing the soil to a depth of at least one foot.

> You said, "I recommend removing and replacing the soil to a depth of at least one foot." Seriously?

As we used to say in the Army, "I'm just as serious as a heart attack!"

I wouldn't recommend these measures to everyone any more than I have asked people to flee from houses which are beyond my own personal mold tolerance, if it doesn't seem to bother them and they seem content with their environment.

-Erik (2008)

*

I've seen very good results on property when the top two feet of soil under the bad house is removed.

-Erik (2015)

CHEMICALS

The thing that concerns me is that our society has been educated to resort to chemicals as solutions. This is so deeply ingrained that many people actually think that plug-in "air fresheners" create healthier air.

If everyone who has a mold problem duplicates our experiments in trying to eradicate mold with chemicals, this will be another toxic assault on our environment that will just damage it even further.

-Erik (2006)

*
The first thing people want to do when they start looking at a "mold problem" is chemicalize the situation.

Considering the extent to which mold is growing, just imagine what it would do to the environment if every person who gets worried about mold starts splashing toxic anti-mold chemicals all over the place and into the water system.

If people respond in the way that they have done so far, I expect the sheer volume and toxicity of the chemicals being deployed will merely pose another threat to life on this planet and will probably do very little to slow down the mold.

-Erik (2008)

*Mold sensitized individuals feel sufficient prevalence of mold in so many buildings that we can only imagine what kind of environmental catastrophe would ensue if every building that had mold was treated with toxic chemicals that eventually wind up in the water system.

The recent media discovery that antibacterial soaps and wipes are actually wiping out friendly bacteria and helping create a niche for resistant bad bacteria should be a cautionary tale.

We simply do not have the ability or the technology to accurately predict and control adverse effects from chemicals.

We should emphasize creating mold-unfriendly environments by proper building techniques instead of toxifying bad buildings even further.

-Erik (2009)

*I have been worried about what kind of damage will happen to the water table if thousands of people all start drenching their environment with every mold killing chemical they can buy.

I think the Bible had it right. Anything with mold growing on it after being dried out must be removed to an unclean place outside the city.

Most molds won't continue growing when deprived of water. If they do, I don't think chemicals are likely to stop it, and may actually make the problem worse in the long run.

For the future of our environment, we have to stop messing it up.
I know this is not what people want to hear. It would be nice to spray some killer crap on mold and solve our problems.

But it looks like mold is a much tougher customer that we bargained for.

-Erik (2015)

OZONE

It seems to me that if ozone were used preemptively to keep colonies from forming, it would help keep new growth out of your house and would be a good thing.

But if you kill mold with ozone or bleach or denying it water, the dead spores are still going to become airborne and cause you problems. Stachy needs enough water to grow that the very moisture content helps keep the spores heavy and from going too far.

Mold spores have the same toxin, viable or not, so killing it with bleach or ozone or simply denying it water doesn't help me one bit if the colony can still dry up and drift around.

Fixing a leak or otherwise killing mold without removing the colony may be the precipitating factor that allows dried nonviable spores to blow all over your house and make your problems worse instead of better.

I want to kill mold as much as anybody, but not if it means that the colony loses cohesion and spreads dead (but still toxic) spores around, making the place completely uninhabitable.

-Erik (2002)

*I was being spore plumed by a sewer vent outside my property and beyond my control, so killing the mold was not an option.

Before I knew that spores were equally toxic alive or dead I listened to the information from ozone machine purveyors and bought one.

I knew instantly that this was nothing I wanted to be around.

Since killing the mold was a moot point, the only use I could think of was to try to clear the air and denature the toxins by running the machine when I wasn't around.

According to my perception, it did neither.
I called Prof. Harriet Amman and asked about the claims of ozone machine manufacturers. She told me about the class action suit and warned me against its use.

That was good enough for me.

-Erik (2002)

*

The debate over ozone is so contentious that it's impossible to make a decision about whether it is likely to work based on what you read or hear.

My recommendation is to not take anybody's word for it and find out for yourself.

Find a place that feels safe to do this experiment.

Make sure you feel good and are not reacting to anything in the safe room. Bring a contaminated object into the room and make sure you have established a definite change in how you feel based on the presence of that object.

Ozone the living crap out of it. (Don't breathe the ozone unless you want to lose more lung function.)

See if it made any difference. If not, remove the contaminated object and see if the place reverts to feeling good the way it did before you brought in the object.

Now you know.

-Erik (2002)

*

Prof. Harriet Amman told me ozone wipes out people's sense of smell and oxidizes lung tissues, which fools them into thinking it has reduced something when it really just has reduced their ability to detect it. And at the expense of long term damage.

-Erik (2011)

**SELLING TO OTHERS**

I would remediate up to whatever the remediologist considers safe and sell out.

Just as with a peanut reactivity - would you have any qualms about selling peanuts to somebody who doesn't have that problem?
From what I can tell, Moldies are just like Peanutties.

Others need not be scared, and if you go around trying to tell them they should be, they'll think you are a lunatic.

And considering this is how you would view a Peanuttie who told you to beware of peanuts, maybe they'd be right.

We're like a new breed of misfits. We have to make our own way through society, on the fringe.

I would say that if the remediators are satisfied your stuff is safe, then you should be too.

At least until further notice.

-Erik (2007)

*

I've seen non-responders existing reasonably well for decades in places that I find intolerable. I might tell them they could perhaps feel a bit better, but it is not my place to advise the world to act as crazy as I do about it. Just that it's a possibility that might be worth doing.

By my standards, we'd have to destroy twenty percent of all buildings, and that just isn't realistic.

Personal choice. RemEDIATE to the current acceptable standard and bail out.

-Erik (2008)

*

The Indoor Air Quality groups are in absolute turmoil.

Some of the remediators have themselves become so ill by their work that they've been sensitized and can appreciate what it is like. Others are still of a mind that you can "dry it out and paint it over" without fear.

So everyone is remediating according to their own concepts of how much mold can affect a person. No matter what level they are at, they tend to discount anyone who is operating at a higher level of reactivity.
So a "Paint Over" thinks the "Get Rid Ofs" are exaggerating, and the "Get Rid Ofs" seem to think that the "Run for Your Lifers" are going too far. And the "Run for Your Lifers" seem to think that "Live in a Tenters" are way off the charts.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 31

Air Filters

A BURNING POT

Using filters is like dealing with a sinking ship by installing a pump to bail it out instead of fixing the leak.

Doesn't solve the problem. Just slows it down.

The "filterists" like to promote filtration as a cure, when the reality is that the most you can expect is a reduction in exposure that may or may not be enough, depending on a multitude of factors.
I believe we had a study not too long ago that claimed success by installing whole building filters because sixty percent of the people said they felt better. Not too successful if you were one of the people who didn't though.

-Erik (2006)

*  

I am very much opposed to air filters for anything except adjunctive or temporary use. I've seen too many people try to rely on them in an over-tolerance situation. Although they help a bit, sometimes it's just enough to keep people where they are so they don't move on and experience real improvement. The balance I've seen has been that they do far more harm than good.  

But above a moldy basement? I would guess that in a place like that, the benefit might hardly even be noticeable.  

And then just wait for a dark and stormy night when the plumes come out!  

-Erik (2008)

*  

I found air filters to be most unhelpful, as they play a trick with people's imaginations. Because they do help, a little, it persuades you to take lesser action against the problem.  

Kind of like a thin hot pad on a burning pot. You only burn yourself "a little."  

But if you didn't have the hot pad, you wouldn't grab the pot at all and you wouldn't get even a little bit burned.  

To my way of thinking, if you are in a place that needs an air filter, what you really need is to be in a better place.  

-Erik (2010)

*  

The only time air purifiers have the potential to work is when the problem is so minor that subtracting what the purifier catches is enough to make your sinuses catch so little that it breaks the power of that "whatever."

In other words, air purifiers tend to be slightly palliative, and this can be harmful.
If it convinces you that it helped a little bit, this will delay your departure from an environment in which air purifiers are woefully inadequate to solve your problems.

We see this all the time in sick buildings.

The temporary reduction in symptoms is perceived as a sign that it’s working.

But this diverts their attention away from just how much it isn’t working.

-Erik (2010)

* 

If a place is so mild that air filters actually help all that much, the problem is probably fixable, and the money would be better spent on finding the mold and eradicating it.

If the problem is anything more, the filters will be one more piece of contaminated crap that has to be abandoned when you finally have to bail out anyway.

I decided that if mold were present, it was better for me to be made aware of it and motivated to find it immediately. I gave away my filter systems to people who still want to play that game.

-Erik (2011)

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

The difficulty of maintaining a sufficiently low level of exposure in populated areas has grown noticeably more difficult in the last few years.

Objects that have had long-term exposure stay bad for a long time. Things that have had only momentary exposure clean up readily.

I used to have a forced "outside-air" HEPA system on my RV to maintain positive pressure of filtered air. I thought that this would allow me to stay more comfortable in a contamination zone.

But all it did was allow more time for my entire RV to build up an intolerable level that takes longer to die down.

So I removed the filter system. Better to get the bad news immediately and act immediately. Otherwise the consequences of toxin accumulation are intensified beyond anything that I can handle.
So all my possessions have not been in spore plumes long enough to be a problem. The objects that I have bought which were "pre-contaminated" by storage in a moldy warehouse or even during manufacturing, I have been forced to abandon.

I do my best to perceptify things before I buy them, but I'm not always successful and only find out that I cannot tolerate it after bringing it home.

This gets expensive, but I wasn't given a choice in the matter.

-Erik (2006)

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

I remember one woman insisting that there was no mold in her house - that she had the cleanest house in town and was running six HEPA filters at all times.

She said, "I know the problem isn't in my house. In fact, I feel somewhat better in my house than I do outside."

Well, there it is. The whole area around her house is bad and she is only reducing her exposure by the amount that the HEPA filters manage to subtract.

But the inability to recover is an indication that she is not managing to lower overall exposure enough. Difficult to do when the HEPA filters are really just catching the spores that manage to miss being inhaled while on their way to the filter.

About the only real way to find out for sure is to take a vacation out to some other environment and look for a shift in overall symptomology.

Having a Mobile Environmental Control Unit is the best way to really find this out. If it feels perfect out in the desert and then you drive into a moldy part of town, you know that the unit itself was good right up until the time you entered a mold zone - so it wasn't the house itself that is the problem at all.

It's the ambient levels in the mold zone.

-Erik (2008)

THE SOURCE OF THE BADNESS

I was just visiting a friend who lives in a spore plume, so I ran the HEPA filter in my RV to minimize contamination of the interior while I was there.
Now that I am back out of the plume, I cannot tolerate the toxins concentrated in the HEPA filter.

But it did its job and kept cross contamination down to a minimal level.

Usually the toxins denature over several weeks and the HEPA filter will be good again for future use, but I still stay away from it.

- Erik (2005)

* 

Once a filter becomes loaded with mold spores, it becomes the source of the badness.

This can happen quickly, depending on ambient levels of mold. One plume and the filter is drenched.

Lots of Moldies have made the mistake of taking the air filter with them when they move. They turn it on in their new location and within a minute, they've contaminated the entire area - making it feel just as bad as where they came from.

- Erik (2006)

* 

You have to take into consideration that if a place is really bad, and beyond your capacity to tolerate, a filter might wind up being one more expensive possession that has to be left behind.

- Erik (2006)

* 

I got a new HEPA vacuum when I was still trying to fight "the bad place." It was a nice one, a Miele.

Seemed to help for a while. But a strange thing happened. The vacuum itself started to hit me.

Of course I changed bags, blew out the inside, washed it...but it just kept getting worse and worse. Finally I couldn't get within ten feet of the damn thing.

It was about this time when I started asking myself, "Haven't I tried hard enough? What more can I do? I think it's time to get the hell out of here."
Here’s the irony. It’s better to have moved into a superbad place than a moderately bad place.

The superbad will force you out, giving you the opportunity to get much better.

But a moderately bad place will just keep you there, vacuuming, washing. HEPA-ing, searching for mold-ing. wasting your life-ing…. and removing your chance to get out and feel like a human is supposed to.

-Erik (2008)

IONIZERS

I did try an ionizer. They do seem to precipitate some airborne irritants onto the floor (and make a mess in front of the machine), but I just wasn't having comparable results to being out in a pristine location. So I made finding such a "feel good location" a primary goal.

-Erik (2008)

*

People have been doing the negative ion stuff for years.

Just makes toxins fall down to horizontal surfaces. Great, while you’re standing up. Not so great when you lie down.

I had this same difference of view with the professor in Kansas who was designing MECU's that were comparable to rocket ships.

"Why would I want to live like that?"

If living there requires anything like that, I'd rather just move to some place that doesn't.

-Erik (2008)

ELECTROSTATIC

Back in 1997, Prof. Harriet Ammann warned me against electrostatic air purifiers, right after I had just bought one!

She told me absolutely not to use it, that it would just release more toxins.
Prof. Ammann told me that the oxidizing plates of an electrostatic filter would "oxidize" the spores, and the toxins could not help but be released as a gas.

So my money was wasted and I tried installing HEPA filters.

HEPA filters do not degrade the particle, so more of the toxins stay caught in the filter along with the particulate matter.

Isn't this fun how we all have to learn this the hard way?

-Erik (2010)
Chapter 32

Mold Testing

SUITABLE INFORMATION

People express dismay that I am suggesting the possibility that testing might not give you suitable information - that you can be “moldsick” despite your environment testing perfectly normal.

But that is really how it is.

I just saw a story about a guy who spent tens of thousands of dollars on testing, starting thirteen years ago, to find out why he, his family, and some of the guests in his recently built house were getting sick.

The testing repeatedly found nothing. Assured by the “experts” that the house was OK, he stayed there.

The whole family now has MCS.
He went on to say that the least credentialed of the experts he hired took him aside and told him "off the record" that none of his clients with a problem like this had ever found the problem before running out of money.

Yep. That's the way of it. Seen that a lot.

Heck, I've been back to the house where I fell apart in Incline Village and the mold isn't even in the house. It's just down the street about half a block away.

-Erik (2008)

*

I was at the point of relying on my senses before toxic mold was even discovered.

It has been amazing to watch people's trust and reliance on testing concepts that were so inadequate as to be downright misleading.

Unfortunately, the sicker you are, the more you have no choice, as the tests aren't even good enough for an "average" person.

-Erik (2015)

THE WRONG TOXIN

I don't think they are measuring the right toxin at all.

I don't think they have discovered it yet.

-Erik (2015)

*

If mold is doing what I think it might be (making nanoparticles to serve as a delivery device for the mycotoxins), ERMI cannot possibly apply to this situation.

-Erik (2015)

*

As told in *Surviving Mold*, I never thought the problem was any kind of normal product of mold, but rather, some kind of intermittent emission of a super toxin of which the medical profession knows nothing.
I think the variables of this yet-to-be-researched phenomenon are so unknown that there is no way to predict outcomes from avoidance reliably.

-Erik (2015)

*

As I said in *Surviving Mold*, I believe the actual toxin in question has never been isolated and elucidated.

The "experts" are trying to twist the properties of this agent into their belief system about what their known-substances can or cannot do, while completely ignoring the observations from sensitives about how it really behaves.

-Erik (2015)

**HYPERREACTIVITY**

I'd like to see a Moldie set up some contaminated possessions around the campsite for mold experts to test.

"Okay, what's the ERMI on my sleeping bag?"

See if they can find anything that correlates with our requirements.

-Erik (2015)

*

Too bad that testing is at best, just a snapshot.

If someone is testing their house, they aren't doing extreme avoidance.

At least, not if they are doing it because they want to rely on the results.

-Erik (2015)

*

Severe reactors are completely off their radar.
Testing does not apply to us, no more than a test can find all the instances when a peanut reactor might encounter a few trace peanut molecules.

- Erik (2015)

*

Having determined that the very notion of testing was ludicrous for someone at my level of reactivity, I wanted to find out if others were the same. Accompanying them into exposures soon gave the answer.

They would point at small areas which were stable and had no effect on us beyond a few feet.

Unless the tester were as sensitive as we, they would never find these areas.

I demonstrated this to Dr. Vincent Marinkovich by locating a mold colony in his own reception room by pointing at a very small area in one wall and insisting it was there. Dr. Marinkovich led me through his office had had me check each room, which were all clear.

The next visit, he told me he had put mold plates in every room and several in the reception room. The only one that came up positive was the one directly under where I indicated.

Needless to say, he was shocked. "I've never seen anyone do that before"

Considering that I had found others who were like me, it seems clear that we are encountering a paradigm shift that has outstripped both our technology, and our conceptual framework of what to expect. Guttation droplets are exudates of a crystalline structure.

They cannot be cultured, recognized by examination of air samples, or detected on tape lifts by conventional means.

Mold test reports appear to have been more of a loose guide than a reliable measure of toxic exposure.

It might even be that an ERMI means almost nothing in terms of whether one is being exposed.

A relevant paper:

>Guttation droplets of Penicillium nordicum and Penicillium verrucosum contain high concentrations of the mycotoxins ochratoxin A and B
Abstract: Eight of eleven ochratoxigenic isolates of Penicillium nordicum and Penicillium verrucosum produced guttation droplets when grown on Czapek yeast extract (CYA) agar for 10–14 days at 25°C. Parallel cultivation of one strain each of P. nordicum and P. verrucosum on malt extract agar demonstrated that higher volumes of exudate are produced on this agar. However, HPLC analyses revealed higher concentrations of ochratoxin A (OTA) and B (OTB) in droplets originating from cultures on CYA. For quantitative determination of the mycotoxin contents, triplicates of three isolates each of P. nordicum and P. verrucosum were grown as single spot cultures on CYA for up to 14 days at 25°C. Guttation droplets were carefully collected between day 11 and 14 with a microliter syringe from each culture. Extracts from exudates and corresponding mycelia as well as fungal free agar were analyzed by HPLC for the occurrence of ochratoxin A (OTA) and B (OTB). Mean concentrations ranging between 92.7–8667.0 ng OTA and 159.7–2943.3 ng OTB per ml were detected in the guttation fluids. Considerably lower toxin levels were found in corresponding samples of the underlying mycelia (9.0–819.3 ng OTA and 4.5–409.7 ng OTB/g) and fungal free agar (15.3–417.0 ng OTA and 12.7–151.3 ng OTB/g). This is the first report which shows that high amounts of mycotoxins could be excreted from toxigenic Penicillium isolates into guttation droplets.

(Thanks to Greg Weatherman for providing this information.)

-Erik (2015)

AIR TESTING

Air sampling is misleading.

If you do get a result from air sampling it confirms the problem, but if you get a negative it rules out nothing.

Knowledge of the principle of variable toxicity from substrate and competing molds alone would make it unreasonable to try to assess toxic exposure by counting spores.

The intermittent nature of spore plume release means that airborne spore concentrations is far too inconsistent to reliably determine inhalation potential.

High levels of mycotoxins can come from colonies below cement slabs or from sewer pipes right through materials that stop the spores.

Mycotoxin release from spores means that ambient levels of VOC concentration are completely independent of the presence of spores.
Another complicating factor that they are finally starting to realize is that individual susceptibilities makes VOC testing futile except as a theoretical value for a baseline for acceptable exposure for a "normal" person.

I have found many places that give me a VOC response without significant spore contamination.

I'm not totally against air sampling but my own experience is that it means so little as to be almost worthless.

-Erik (2002)

*

The Indoor Air Quality paradigm has been that one can test a building by detecting spores. In fact, the entire industry is devoted to and counting upon this concept as a reliable means of testing.

They should know better! All one had to do is examine their own records, which show that it is relatively difficult to find even a few airborne spores of Stachy, even though Stachy is the mold that is commonly associated with sick people.

It was apparent that the model didn't fit the facts.

Fortunately for me, I had already done my own experimental testing which convinced me of this, and so paid no heed to the partial advice which would have kept me in an exposure situation when the spores were not found.

Think of it for just a second. If Stachy is the one implicated as the worst toxic mold, yet the experts know full well that it is so difficult to detect, how are people being exposed to it?

We know now that for every airborne spore, there are at least five hundred mycotoxin laden submicron fragments that can still induce a toxic response. This fungal detritus looks like nothing more than common dust.

For all these years, spore testing has been based on a flawed premise. Just think of all the people who had their houses tested and were relieved that no toxic mold was detected?

Yes, testing can detect mold. But finding none doesn't mean no mycotoxin exposure.

-Erik (2008)
INDOOR VS. OUTDOOR MOLD

If comparing indoor against outdoor spore counts is the state of the science, I would say that they have major misconceptions about mold exposure. Mold at toxic levels indoors is still a toxic exposure outdoors.

I moved into a place that had no mold inside at all. I went nuts trying to find it inside until I realized that I was getting hit outside, especially when the wind was from the southwest.

I wound up sleeping outside and upwind of the house in various wind directions until I could get a vector on the location of the colony. There was nothing I could do about it except try to be somewhere else when the wind blew from that direction.

I've found enough places are drenched in spore plumes from somewhere else to know that if you are extraordinarily sensitive, even the most rigorous testing is no guarantee the place will be survivable.

-Erik (2002)

*

Unless you have a mutual understanding that there can be colonies hidden below cement slabs, or in community sewer systems, or in a neighbor’s house that can still drive a hypersensitive person to an unacceptable inflammatory response, there will be no understanding of the success or failure of remediation.

-Erik (2003)

*

What’s the obsession with indoor vs outdoor mold?

What does it matter if you inhale spores while you are enclosed by walls or not?

The spore plumes I encounter outdoors feel no different to me than the ones I find inside.

If you find airborne spores outside at slightly lower levels than inside, would you consider that area perfectly safe until the moment you built a couple of walls around that spot and suddenly turned them into “inside spores”?

-Erik (2004)

*
When you talk to most people about IAQ it is as if they believe that outside mold is mysteriously harmless which struck me as an odd way to look at it.

The vast majority of people I talk to about mold are already sensitized and listen to "experts" who say that they cannot possibly be reactive in outdoor settings and remain ill as a result of not taking this into consideration.

-Erik (2004)

*

My lungs stubbornly refuse to listen to me when I tell them that the experts say the spores should be perfectly safe to inhale at the moment I clear the doorway and step outside.

-Erik (2006)

**TEST KITS**

The mold plates are pretty much useless since the most toxic mold, Stachybotrys, doesn't even grow on most media unless it's Czapek cellulose media or cornmeal agar.

That's if you even manage to catch a viable spore. Stachy has a exceptionally large and heavy spore that doesn't stay airborne long and most are on the ground and dead within an hour of leaving the colony.

Airborne testing is almost as unreliable as mold plates and finding any airborne spores at all indicates a very serious problem.

"Following the water" and doing a direct tape press on the mold to send to the lab is the most reliable way to identify a Stachy problem.

You can send samples yourself without hiring a remediator, which could destroy your house’s resale value since many states are now writing disclosure laws for mold.

-Erik (2003)

*

I gave up on all the testing, mold plates and such years ago as being completely useless as a personal guide. I only perceive their use as a demonstration for someone else.

So I don't know where to get them anymore.
Usually people have good mold indicators all around them without the need for any plate.

Shower enclosures, toilet tanks, cutting boards and vegetables give me all the signs I need.

Onions in particular are exceptionally good for mold detection.

In my mother’s house, you can leave onions out until they dry up so pristinely that they look like they could be used as dried onions for cooking.

In the mold castles that make me feel like crap, onions always show concentrations of various molds.

-Erik (2005)

*

It’s no good doing those tape lifts.

The only time tape lifts ever find anything is if they are pressed directly to a wet colony, and if you luck out and hit the toxin former buried in the midst of other molds which prepare the ground for the bad stuff which is mixed in with other molds.

All those tape lifts do is cause more disbelief and confusion, because they don’t find the real source of the problem.

That’s why I led a mycologist around and directed him to tape lift directly on mold that slammed me.

He did a lift on mold up in the attic and identified it as Aspergillus. I immediately took a swipe at the stuff and said, "This stuff? Hell, I'll spread this on my sandwich with peanut butter...this isn’t the problem."

If I hadn’t been pushy on this, we very well might have stopped at Aspergillus, and not kept going until I identified the slammerstuff.

And you know what? Even if we hadn’t, that still wouldn't have changed what I felt in that zone, my having to bail out.

Considering that my mind had already been made up, and that I was already on my way out, finding Stachy was a good confirmation...but it wasn't necessary and didn't change anything. It was just an expensive way of finding out what I already knew.

-Erik (2008)
* 

If somebody figures out that mold is kicking their butt and then they find some, that last bit of information is generally just the final thing that scares them into taking action.

The trouble is that these kits aren't reliable, so if something isn't found, they get "unscreared" back to square one about mold and focus elsewhere. The best I've seen them accomplish so far is confirm what was already pretty much obvious.

Even if you find something by current medical standards, it's not enough to make you ill. Even the very worst moldy places still have the experts baffled at how sick people are becoming. So how will a mold test convince anyone?

-Erik (2008)

* 

The really useful lesson from having a Mobile Environmental Control Unit is to find out just how worthless ERMI or any mold tests are.

When you have a controlled environment that feels consistently good when parked in a pristine zone turn to feeling just the same as a killer "sick building" simply by parking in a wayward plume, you see that the transient nature of this phenomenon means that testing cannot account for the real time shift in conditions.

You spent your money having a test done, found nothing....and then the wind shifted and it's right back to square one.

-Erik (2008)

* 

>What is the best lab to use to detect mycotoxins?

What will it mean if the lab detects some?

What will it change if they don't?

-Erik (2008)

**MISLED BY “EXPERTS”**

Mold testing has such weird contradictions that at times it almost seems to prove that the problem couldn't possibly be from mold.
-Erik (2006)

* 

Remediators often cannot find detectable Stachy..yet Stachy is the "bad mold.” It means that testing for Stachy is reliably unreliable.

Unfortunately, people’s mistrust of their own perceptions caused them to only rely on testing, and so even the evidence that testing could not be counted on was discounted.

-Erik (2008)

* 

What I do know is that many people who searched for mold, filtered for mold, tested for mold, moved several times to rule out mold...finally got to the point where they realized that none of this means anything.

It only threw them off the track.

-Erik (2008)

* 

The point here is that since testing didn't find the Stachy, the toxicologist dismissed it in favor of concentrating on formaldehyde. If the tenants hadn't been dissatisfied and called someone else, they would have continued to think it was just formaldehyde.

That is the problem that faith in conventional testing inadvertently creates.

-Erik (2008)

* 

The entire mold industry has been predicated upon detecting and counting viable spores...you know, like the crude "mold trays."

If one knows that the toxins are not only on the spores - no more than nerve gas will stay stuck to the canister or bomb that delivered it - you know their entire conceptual framework is wrong.

Yet they refuse to admit it, do not develop tactics that match the phenomenon, and in general, mislead people into a false sense of security because their tests indicated that there should be no problem.
So those of us who are beyond the point of being misled are very much on our own. We have to work out what works for us.

It’s not easy, but it’s better than continually trying to make their flawed concepts work when we know that it’s not even possible that they ever will.

-Erik (2008)

*I went out of my way to ask old-time remediators if they were familiar with this mold hysteria description of illness, which causes people to abandon their homes.

They all said no.

So if you have testing performed by one of these people with massive mold experience, they will tell you that mold is troublesome, but not in the way that you are complaining about.

The mixed replies of those who are getting a clue and those who still think that mold is exactly as it used to be are creating no end of confusion for those who are trying to get help.

-Erik (2008)

*I know for certain that for others at this level of reactivity, conventional testing only served to confirm a lack of physiological basis for their complaints - which added greatly to the disbelief of people who doubted their illness.

People must learn to disregard testing if it conflicts with their perceptions.

-Erik (2008)

*What I have told people is that the type of testing they are recommending is not usable as a guide to action.

Their response is that they understand this but just want to use them to gain a sense of the problem.

That means they are relying on the test as some kind of indicator of exposure, which means they don’t understand the problem.
To try and shake them out of this, just look at the inability of airborne testing to find more than just a few Stachy spores.

Yet the sickest people seem to be in Stachy-infested houses.

That should have told them right there that if they are trying to use mold plates and airborne spore testing to get a sense of the problem, they are almost 100% guaranteed to be misled.

-Erik (2009)

IN YOUR HOME

I was driven out of a house by a spore plume that wasn't even on the property. You are going to see a lot of this.

Unless you have a mutual understanding that there can be colonies hidden below cement slabs, or in community sewer systems, or in a neighbor’s house that can still drive a hypersensitive person to an unacceptable inflammatory response, there will be no understanding of the success or failure of remediation.

-Erik (2004)

* 

My major sources of exposure weren't in the house at all. Sometimes they were coming from such unexpected places as a moldy thermal as I was hang gliding over an area deforested by fire north of Mt. Hull.

And that’s what I saw in others around me, like the cluster of teachers at Truckee High School.

All it took was a few hours in the wrong room when the spore plumes were acting up. That was it.

Testing that is conducted just a few feet away doesn't show it, and testing done at home because you feel so bad certainly doesn't tell you anything about these other exposures.

I guess that testing isn't worthless if it confirms an exposure. But for the most part, I find it such an unrealistic guide to action that it is nothing I would rely upon.
It wasn't until I learned to rely solely upon my perceptions of exposure that I finally managed to take control of this problem.

-Erik (2006)

*

One of the reasons I "dis" testing is that I've seen so many people become ill from the accumulation of exposures from sources that were not in their house or place of employment.

Many times, the one place they want to have tested was nothing more than the final straw that broke the camel's back.

It was where they were going, sometimes not even on a regular basis.

Just passing through some really bad plumes was enough.

Once one shifts from the notion of testing to using perceptions, the only thing testing can possibly be good for is purposes of litigation.

By perceptification, if it was in your home or work, you would rely on your own senses and testing would not be needed.

From where I sit, it looks like most people's illnesses are driven by total toxic burden from many sources that they will never find through conventional testing.

-Erik (2009)

**UBIQUITOUS**

Avoiding exposure completely is impossible.

It's impossible to completely eradicate down to the last spore.

In 1997, John Banta of Sacramento-based Restoration Consultants told me that there is not a single house that is completely free of Stachy.

In 1998, Cornell did a study that found significant Stachy in one out of five large buildings in a study of several hundred buildings accompanied by people with known symptoms of reactivity to mold.

I am all for getting the levels of mold that affect me out of buildings, but I cannot figure out how to quantify it in any meaningful way.
The variability of secondary metabolites generated by access to specific substrates and factors of competition between mold species means that some Stachy can affect me at levels below detection while other Stachy at high concentrations does not constitute a "toxic exposure."

So my aim is not to avoid mold based upon testing. It is to stay on the upside of the immune power curve of exposure to a ubiquitous irritant.

-Erik (2006)

**MOLD DOGS**

A mold dog wouldn't do me much good.

I brought in a bad armload of firewood today, and that was all she wrote.

My clothes, bedding and floor where it sat were zapped.

I need to react quickly, in real time and to exposures/contamination that a dog couldn't cover or warn me about.

I need to take wind direction and distance from the source into account, and try explaining that to a dog.

Besides, my cat wouldn't dig it.

-Erik (2010)

*

I remember hearing that mold dogs were dying after a few years.

It's not really fair to the dogs, since they have no way of knowing the fate which comes of this occupation.

Since exposures from contaminated objects need to be controlled for, a dog would be of no help for those.

Nor for all the places where dogs are not allowed.

I don't need a mold dog. I have myself.

-Erik (2010)
Chapter 33

Mold Characteristics

ALLERGY VS. TOXICITY

Mycotoxins are chemicals.

That's why the allergists are so confused.

Mycotoxin reactivity is MCS.

As long as the allergists keep trying to treat this like it was hay fever, they aren't going to be able to help anyone.

-Erik (2002)

*
When people talk about mold, the component they recognize is the allergic one. They keep wanting to use moldy odors as an indicator - and sniffing, sneezing, watery eyes as a sign they've been hit.

But there is another component, which is not so apparent.

It is the long term interference of toll receptor function by the blocking of these receptors by ionophore neurotoxins.

That's why the mycotoxin connection to illness could hide in plain sight.

People thought that the allergic reaction was the only phenomenon to be measured, and that any other peculiarities that took place in the presence of mold must be something else.

The mycotoxins cause a "panic attack" feeling. Makes sense - they're neurotoxins!

Yes, allergies can go along with this, but the "depression response" is far more useful and reliable as an indicator.

People are amazed when they find out that sensations they had absolutely ruled out because they didn't appear to be consistent with mold turned out to be an inflammatory response to mold toxins. And these toxins can be on something that had been in a moldy place, even though the spores are long gone.

This made people think that mold couldn't possibly be the problem. But the toxins are very stable and can last for years.

No reason to debate the issue. The tests are available. And then you know.

-Erik (2006)

IT WOULD APPEAR THAT.....

Mold avoidance is a matter of life or death for me, and if I were forced to rely on the advice of "experts" I would have been dead long ago.

The only thing about mold that is important is whether you are in an exposure situation that is enough to make you sick.

It would appear that:
Stachy spores fresh from the colony tend to be of such a large size that they don't remain airborne very long (an hour or less) and typically die before they ever make it as far as your mold plate - which it wouldn't grow on anyway unless it was Czapek cellulose agar or cornmeal media. Finicky bahstuds.

However, should a viable spore make it to your wet sheetrock, it would immediately reinforce its shell, build up its reserves and set itself up for the possibility of a long wait lest it be deprived of water again.

Once the damn things sporulate and go into "mold hibernation," they can easily last hundreds if not thousands of years.

Pharoah Out! or "Curse of the Moldy Mummies"

Isn't it interesting that in the Book of Leviticus, it says that if you entered one of those unclean moldy places, your clothes were unclean and shouldn't go home with you and make your house moldy.

Not only that, but you yourself became unclean at least until nightfall. It sounded like they had some sort of idea of how long fresh spores were extremely hazardous to your home's health.

Crazy. (Remember my observations about the hair being a good mold transporter.)

Finding water quickly is only important for Stachyspread.

Live or dead - makes no difference to your immune system.

If you live in a spore plume from your neighbor's house, you can bleach 'em, ozonate 'em, radiate 'em, shoot the damn things - doesn't matter.

As long as the spores or the parts thereof land in your space, you get to deal with the toxins.

Dust in the Wind

What happens to all those spores that degrade into unrecognizable fragments?

If the spores can release their toxins in sufficient amounts to contaminate stuff even though you wipe and wash and blast the spores to bits, does that mean that every stinking bit of the toxin has exited the detritus of the spore and is now on your possessions?
Not bloody likely.

Much of that harmless unidentifiable meaningless dust that no one stops to consider still contains more than enough trichothecene toxins to turn your stardust memories into Stachydust nightmares.

Sleepytime!

Stachy, being heavy, usually just drops to lie on horizontal surfaces.

If it's so hard to find airborne spores, why do we get so sick?

The spores release their dang toxic gas and we get to breathe it whether we are snorting dust balls under the bed or not.

But! ever notice how sick you get when you're lying in bed with your face close to the horizontal surface of the bed?

Sometimes you wake up so groggy that you can hardly move, and GEEZ, I felt so tired I could hardly get up, but now that I'm up, I feel so much better for some reason.

How could that be?

I wonder if there's anything on that bed?

I've heard trichothecenes are pretty heat stable. I haven't heard of anything that degrades the toxin in a way that makes it safe for us.

All I know is that I've washed plastic stuff in hot water and left furniture out in the sun and it didn't make any difference.

I had a pair of waterproof binoculars that gave me palps every time I tried to use them. I washed 'em but it did no good.

The only thing that made the badness go away was time.

No way to predict how much time since every object has a different level of exposure, a different absorption/adsorption capacity, different levels of toxicity according to the properties of the mold and a varying propensity to outgas, depending on environmental factors such as temperature and humidity and barometric pressure gradients.

How long does this trichothecene crap last in a human body?
I'll bet the people that tested trichothecene as a chemical warfare agent would know, but
there again, clearance probably depends on so many factors that it wouldn't be
meaningful to attempt a broad projection to apply to so many variables in different
people. I don't know, and they're not saying.

When does the toxin come out to play?

At times of barometric pressure change.

The spores seem to be constantly building up internal pressure so even though they're
always popping a certain number, they're primed to release a staggeringly higher
amount when the barometric pressure has a sudden drop. Kind of like a bunch of
balloons that are blown up as much as they'll take and then you put 'em in the back of
your minivan and drive quickly up a hill. Blammo!

That, I think, is why people complain so much about change in the weather and being
able to sense a barometric pressure change.

It's not the air pressure. It's the mycotoxin release. At least it is for me.

I hear rumors that light and humidity
change can set these critters off too.

Mold is pretty amazing stuff. When the experts tried to grow it in the lab it wasn't toxic at
all. Turned out that unless Stachy has competition, it won't even bother to go to the
trouble of producing toxins. How efficient!

And since the toxins it does bother to produce depend heavily on what it has to work
with, toxicity varies considerably depending on the substrate it's growing on.

No good trying to even guess at toxic exposure based on toxicity measurements of a
sample of spores. It changes even within the same colony.

Trying to measure someone’s exposure to mycotoxins by counting spores in a mold
plate is like trying to measure someone’s secondhand smoke exposure by counting
cigarette butts in an ash tray.

The only measurement that means a thing is whether you feel good or bad in that
environment.

Do people become identically ill in the same environment?

Hah! Most people think you are totally crazy if you claim mold is making you horribly
sick.
The group that just gets a bit of malaise and a headache know that mold is a bad thing, but think you're either exaggerating or perhaps a genetically weak person who needs to be weeded out of the gene pool. At least it'd be better all around if you'd just shut up about this mold madness.

Can't we come up with a test that'll tell us how much is safe?

If there's such a disparate range of response, to whose response to we tailor a test that determines how much is safe?

The person who thinks you're crazy can probably eat Stachyflakes for breakfast.

The headache people can take aspirin and keep their job. They're probably the majority, so in a democracy, we'd decide that a level that keeps them just under pounding migraine is a good test for the masses.

How much good is that going to do for you?

How happy would they be if you were King of the World and burned down all the places that give you fits but don't faze them?

I know everyone who wants to legislate limits for mold is going to hate me for saying this, but I have to live with the reality that there is no standard that can possible apply to my level of sensitivity.

I'm not against creating a standard for mold exposure, especially in the workplace, but it won't help me. I can feel it on people's clothes after they've been in a bad place.

Would mold limits have prevented me from becoming sick?

I don't think so. I never lived or worked or was anywhere that other people didn't share my approximate exposure. I can see that some of them are suffering a bit, but nothing like me. Go figure.

So if you're anything like me, the advice the experts are giving to give you won't even begin to reflect the reality of the extreme measures it takes to avoid feeling moldcrappy.

Why Me?

Been trying to figure that one out nonstop.

-Erik (2002)
STACHYBOTrys

There’s no guarantee that Stachy will get enough moisture to overgrow other molds. From what I hear, mixed colonies are usual.

-Erik (2005)

*

> My own experience is that different environments cause different symptoms with me.

That has been my experience too. It was easily apparent that this was no allergy to a specific mold but a reaction to components of mycotoxins from different molds.

Yes, Stachy has a large spore that requires comparatively more moisture than other molds. It doesn't stay airborne long.

That alone should have been a clue to the "allergy" theorists that this was not consistent with the entire aspect of the illness.

People are dropping in places where no airborne spores are found at all - but there’s generally still some Stachy around. Why would people be so affected by a spore that is almost never inhaled? You do the math.

And of course, the toxins vary by moisture, substrate and pressure from competing molds so the toxicity can be variable in spores from the same species within the same colony.

-Erik (2005)

*

When no doctors would help me to figure this mold problem out, I hired a mycologist to accompany me to various mold colonies so I could assess my reaction and have the offending one identified.

When we got to a black mold on some joists, I stuck my finger in it.

He said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you!"

And I replied, "This stuff? This isn't the one that is bothering me or I'd be slammed by now. I'll eat this mold on my peanut butter sandwich for lunch. This isn't the stuff."

And that one was "Aspergillus Niger."

Then we moved on to Penicillium, and that didn't do it either.
Finally we hit a mold which, when disturbed, put me down for the count. And as I was dropping to the floor, I said, "That's the one."

Stachy, of course.

Nothing like self-testing when doctors refuse to help.

No question about the results.

-Erik (2006)

*

In 1999, I asked Dr. Marinkovich about IgG testing to satratoxin, and he said it was unavailable. I asked how he was determining the degree of reactivity people had to Stachy, and his reply was that he was extrapolating it by the reaction people had to other measurable mold responses.

That's when I said that this wouldn't work, because, "Compared to Stachy, these other molds are less than a mosquito bite on my ass."

Of course, I wouldn't have known this if I hadn't done my own proximity testing to find out.

So other patients, who had no way of knowing how fierce Stachy can be, may have been misled.

-Erik (2008)

*

I have a wood box in my MECU rig, to feed the fireplace.

The wood is covered with Aspergillus.... Niger, probably.

Doesn't seem to give me any trouble at all.

-Erik (2008)

*

Each and every spore contains a myriad of factors, from pre-sensitizers like beta glucans, to stable toxins like trichothecenes, to immune suppressors like cyclosporins.

They are all going to vary, based on species, substrate, water, competition with other microbes, and developmental and genetic differences.
So trying to think of this as one toxin with a predictable span of effects is pretty much doomed to failure.

-Erik (2008)

* 

This is how you can tell that CFS researchers don't know about the mold.

They talk about sick building syndrome and conspicuously fail to mention it. Anybody who does know about it puts it at the top of the list.

There are many considerations in sick building syndrome. But in general, people seem to make the mistake of leaning so far in favor of keeping innumerable other things in mind that molds and mycotoxins are often de-emphasized into inconsequentiality, and are left unconsidered or pushed to the back burner. Sometimes even for decades.

People are already somewhat accustomed to thinking of bacteria as harmful organisms, and therefore have a tendency to discount the input of toxic molds by comparison. I've seen many people eagerly seize upon formaldehyde or carbon monoxide as a much more agreeable and familiar alternative.

And yet throughout the myriad of contributing factors, Stachybotrys continues make its presence known and distinguishes itself with an disquieting frequency.

Lately, more and more people are finding out that mold deserved a little more attention than it received.

-Erik (2008)

**MUSTINESS**

I never use musty odors as a guide. They completely throw you off the track. There are lots of microbial Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's) that are fairly benign and a normal part of the environment.

The ionophore toxins have no odor at all. At best, they induce a sensation of acridity or burning. At lower levels, you won't feel a thing - but they'll still be building up in your system, just like the cumulative effects of carbon monoxide.

I can go into many moldy and musty areas that don't bother me at all.

Once people discover toxic mold, they go crazy and start implicating all mold.
It's not a good idea to try to wipe out all mold. Without mold to do its normal and necessary job of decomposition, we'd be in a real mess.

The enemy isn't all mold, just a few toxin-forming species that have become rather ubiquitous in buildings thanks to a rather unfortunate chain of events that people unwittingly set in motion.

-Erik (2006)

*mVOC's are just the farts from what microbes eat.

That odor comes from mVOC's, microbial volatile organic compounds from normal metabolic function as mold colonies subsist on substrate.

Sure we can have VOC's without mycotoxins. Lots of 'em.

The killer stuff that we need to worry about is the secondary metabolites: the antimicrobial mycotoxins that are packaged in the spore to give it protection from competitors as it wanders off to attempt to start a new colony.

Since all slimes, molds, smuts, yeasts and bacteria produce mVOC's as a normal nontoxic byproduct, using a musty odor as a guide to avoidance will have you running from a lot of places where "good fungi" and bacteria are just doing their normal and necessary job of decomposing waste.

That's why I don't bother to run unless I perceive something a little stronger. Either VOC's that happen to also have secondary metabolites, or just the reaction even if I don't smell anything.

Mycotoxin avoidance is primarily dedicated to staying out of the range of toxic secondary metabolites that come from mold colonies in spore clouds which, when driven by the wind in a specific direction, are called plumes.

-Erik (2006)

*The neurotoxic mycotoxins have no odor per se.

They creates an acrid, burning olfactory sensation.

The trick is to distinguish acridity from stench so there is no need to run from harmless mVOC's.
I only respond to sensation and not to musty smells.

Spores just drift around, armed with their antimicrobial defensive toxins.

Decomposing areas of mustiness can also contain aerosolized bacterial endotoxins which can be very nasty. I'm not saying that mustiness should be ignored, just that it's not a reliable indicator for the mycotoxins that really make my life miserable.

-Erik (2006)

*

Mycotoxins have no odor. Mustiness is a normal byproduct of microbial decomposition - mostly harmless.

Because molds put out mustiness, the temptation is to use that as an indicator of toxic exposure.

But it just doesn't work that way. Mycotoxins are a separate deal.

-Erik (2007)

*

Mold is a natural, normal, and necessary part of our environment. Without "good" mold, we would be in a real mess.

I'm only concerned with the bad stuff, and make no effort whatsoever to avoid any type of mold that isn't bothering me.

-Erik (2008)

*

Mycologists assure me that what people smell are associated VOC's from decomposition.

The purified mycotoxins themselves have no odor at all.

Only an acrid irritating sensation.

-Erik (2015)
**SPORES VS. TOXINS**

I'm told that they have identified a housing project contaminated with Stachybotrys where the colony was so tightly sealed that no spores were escaping and the toxic volatile organic compounds alone were causing inhabitants to become ill.

The tests I have done on myself indicate that the VOC's are sufficient to re-establish all my symptoms without inhalation of the spores.

My sensitivity is sufficiently extreme to enable me to easily identify contaminated materials and correlate period of barometric pressure change to increased concentration of toxins as the mold sporulates.

-Erik (2000)

*

Dr. Sprott’s work with controlling SIDS by covering moldy mattresses with an impermeable plastic membrane and my experiment with controlled exposure to a contaminated object under layers of blankets confirms the importance of understanding the mycotoxin effect.

My experience is that an avoidance strategy must take this into account in order to be effective.

-Erik (2002)

*

The mere presence of mold does not necessary mean that there are mycotoxins or spores in the air.

We all know that you can come face to face with Stachy and still find no airborne spores. Strange, but true.

And if one considers mycotoxins to be defensive secondary metabolites, then non toxigenic molds which produce none can be present in great quantity - but still no "toxins" are present.

-Erik (2006)

*

I tested my reactivity by wrapping a sample in a HEPA filter and placing it under six layers of blankets and trying to sleep on it to see if the "effect" could be filtered out. The
results caused me to propose to Dr. Marinkovich in 1998 that the toxins sail right on through a filter and that spore inhalation is not necessary to create a response.

Acting somewhat surprised at what I had done, he told me that he had just heard about a housing project in Sweden where the inhabitants were all sick but airborne testing revealed nothing. When the walls were opened up, the colony was found - so tightly sealed that spores were not escaping.

But it made everyone ill anyway.

Not much use concentrating on counting spores if the toxins operate independently.

-Erik (2006)

KILLING MOLD

People with CFS often are hit by allergies to common mold spores. But the only mold component that I am concerned with is from specific mycotoxins that are produced by certain toxin forming molds feeding on building materials.

The most potent toxin formers have more limited range due to their large and heavy spores, so spore counts from weather reports tell you nothing about toxic exposure.

Mold toxins remain whether the spore is alive or dead, so bleaching or killing the mold by any means, including just depriving the colony of water, can dry out the colony. This can liberate clouds of lightened dead spores and increase your exposure to mycotoxins.

-Erik (2005)

* "Kills black mold" without some warning that killing mold can actually release more toxins and make you sicker is a pretty good indication that the purveyor has leaped on the "mold is gold" bandwagon without a full understanding of the problem.

Killing mold doesn't necessarily do anything to remove or neutralize the mycotoxins, which are quite chemically stable and remain potent whether the spore is alive or dead.

Thanks to vast amounts of advertising, people go to great efforts to kill mold that is probably already nonviable after a few hours in the air without water - and do little about removing the spores, which still retain their toxic pathogenic potential.

-Erik (2008)
STICKINESS

This is why scientists can't find anything.

They don't understand that this is ionophore toxicity.

These toxins adsorb by Van Der Waals type forces.

Their covalent bonds are dictated by electrochemical sub-molecular dispersion forces and are not governed by the physical mechanisms we usually visualize.

This is why I said that I must do preemptive avoidance rather than try to remediate anything.

Once an ionophore toxin gloms onto something by submolecular bonding, it cannot be removed by conventional means.

This is why Dr. Shoemaker uses CSM, because its long-chain polystyrene backbone has a specific electrostatic charge that has a special affinity for ionophores.

And that is also why I am suspicious about certain types of plastic, because they possess this same potential for toxin acquisition.

Certain materials must be kept away from the really bad contamination zones, period! Because once the ionophores take hold, there is no way in hell you can really clean them off, so far as I know.

-Erik (2009)

*

Naturally, I have a completely different idea of why these toxins are so sticky. They are submicron fragments with high electrostatic properties, which means they glom onto things due to Van Der Waals or London Dispersion Forces.

And boy…do they love to stick to plastic!

I made the mistake of spending too long in a bad zone. I had to get rid of a lot of plastic stuff. But things that had only temporary exposure don't seem to have the chance to attract a lot of stuff. So I keep myself out of bad zones, and that does the trick for me.

I almost never have to decontaminate my possessions now. Just the clothes from being out and about.

-Erik (2012)
SATELLITE COLONIES

Mold will grow on cement, if the cement has absorbed organic materials which will support the colony or is adjacent to anything that mold likes to feed on.

Satellite colonies often appear in places where mold wouldn't ordinarily grow if necessary metabolites are replenished by plumes from the main colony.

Mold will even grow down the length of the strands of fiberglass insulation by passing along nutrients from the closest source. So as long as one portion of a mold colony on cement has access to food and the concrete is a source of moisture, mold can bridge the gap and spread onto areas where it otherwise wouldn't grow.

I suspect that the mold in this toilet is an opportunistic satellite that is being supported by another source somewhere in that bathroom.

I would look behind the shower first.

-Erik (2005)

*

If you see mold growing in a place that isn't really mold friendly, as with the example of finding Stachy on a radiator, it's a good bet that it's coming from somewhere else and that if you got rid of the mother colony, these places would probably cease to be a problem.

If you don't find the main source, you'll go nuts putting out spot fires.

-Erik (2006)

*

The source of the “really bad stuff” is not likely to be found on windowpanes.

If mold is growing there, it's very likely being supported by a mixed mother colony somewhere that could very well contain a culprit neurotoxin producer.

But you don't want to mess with a mother colony! You don't even want to personally find it.

-Erik (2008)
SPORULATION

Archeologists have opened Egyptian tombs that were hermetically sealed and had air pressure differential and that lit up with fungal growth as soon as they were opened.

Fungi still viable!

But the properties of sporulation require reinforcement of reserves for such long periods of stasis. Spore plumes are fragile according to what I read.

-Erik (2005)

*

When mold colonies get plenty of water, they increase toxin production because they have the biological means to do it.

But more water also makes colonies more cohesive with less spore release.

This is why Chin Yang and some others are totally against killing mold, drying out a colony or using fans.

It's when the colony dries out that these fresh toxin laden spores really begin to fly.

Once they are on the ground, they tend to stay there and decompose, releasing their toxins which helps clear out the area and pave the way for a future spore release, when another of their kind can make its way to a new patch of turf, since most of the ones which didn't reach water are already nonviable.

My understanding is that Stachy spores leave the colony with a very short window of opportunity. About an hour of viability is all they've got.

That's why it's almost impossible to get an airborne sample which tests for spores that grow in a media.

Too late. The show's over, and all that poor little spore can do is release its toxins in a final act of self-sacrifice on behalf of its brothers.

But if a viable spore should alight on a place where it finds any moisture, instead of immediately trying to grow, it first reinforces its shell wall and builds up an internal supply of water, which makes it even heavier.

The spore isn't going anywhere now, but with its thicker shell and water reserves, it is prepared to go dormant for long periods.

That's what "sporulation" means. It's like hibernation, but for spores.
Amazing little trick, for the spore to have a Plan B.

If conditions stay so good that it can go on and grow, it will.

But if the moisture that a sporulating spore encountered was only temporary, it has built up reserves and is ready to go the long haul and wait until conditions are better.

The only downside for a sporulated spore is that it is now so heavy that it is unlikely to become airborne again.

-Erik (2010)

**PLUMES**

To answer, "What is a spore plume?"

Mold colonies send off a cloud of microscopic spores when disturbed.

Think of these as plumes of spores acting exactly like cigarette smoke.

You can stand right next to a colony that isn't disturbed and have times when you feel nothing.

Or when it is windy you can be hundreds of feet away from a colony and if it is blowing a plume toward you, your life will be hell.

-Erik (2004)

*

If a microniche is in a location that makes it to act like a lot, then the overall ambient levels don't make any difference in your level of exposure.

It's like the difference between being in a bar full of diffused cigarette smoke or being directly next to one single ashtray full of smoking butts.

There is none!

Like those teachers at North Tahoe High School who got sick and were directly next to a small colony, and none of the other teachers believed them because they weren't affected.
Perhaps if they saw how a person next to an ashtray can get an overdose of smoke while people a few feet away don’t even perceive it, then they’d see why the spores could affect just the people who were directly in the plume.

-Erik (2006)

*

I only started to take control of this illness when I learned to ignore concepts that didn’t fit the facts.

Lots of musty places don’t bother me at all.

Lots of places that aren’t musty will kill me.

So I go by perception alone - not by odor.

This gets picky, but once the spores have departed the mVOC producing colony, about all they possess is secondary metabolites since they aren’t actively breaking down substrate.

The only problem with calling a spore plume that is emitting these metabolites a "mycotoxin plume" is that toxins emitted by the spores mix with the air and dissipate before going far enough to be called "a plume."

So I call the mixed air/toxin distance from spore accumulations that still gives hits "The Mycotoxin Gradient."

My green binoculars should have not been emitting any spores, considering that I washed them off underwater in a pristine area.

But I could still feel the adsorbed toxins at about eighteen inches - even outside in the wind. The closer they got the worse it felt.

Changing the proximity reveals that the toxin gradient is a fixed value according to air dilution dictated by distance.

So if the mycotoxins are still associated with spore movement, I call it a spore plume.

If the mycotoxins are not associated with spores, by having left the equation from decomposition or removal, and it’s just the toxins that are left, I call the residual toxic effect "The Mycotoxin Gradient" to differentiate it from spore plumes which contain mycotoxins.

-Erik (2006)
NO MAN’S LAND

Remember Kathy Masera's contaminated California Job Journal offices where opposing fungal species created a two inch "no man's land" between them?

Right in between some of the worst mold growth was a two-inch area that was totally free of mold and bacteria - thanks to the intensity of the battle between competitors.

We know that toxigenic molds sense competitors and respond accordingly. The more intense the competition, the more effort put into potentiating the toxins.

There is simply no way to reasonably project levels of toxin exposure by counting spores or trying to measure fungal ecology.

Toxin potential varies between individual spores of the same species even within the same colony. And since Stachy is often part of a mixed colony, examination of a single mold colony is really looking at an aggregate of species which confounds attempts to measure pathogenic potential ever more.

The science shows us that science is not at a point that can make reliable measurements of toxic exposure without recreating laboratory conditions which encompass all the known factors in a sealed environment.

The variables are so great that about the most reliable conclusions one can make regarding fungal ecology is that, "If you feel bad, it is bad."

Not very "scientific," but geez, take a look at the confounders compared to the total lack of controls for these variables.

-Erik (2006)

SYNERGIES

I've heard that some molds are "way pavers" for Stachy, such as Ulocladium Chartarum. They seem to be completely compatible with Stachy and even soften up the terrain so they can grow together as mixed colonies.

Of course, if someone does a tape lift on the U. Chartarum part of the colony, it's even conceivable that they could miss the Stachy buried in another area.

These molds are amazing. Big mistake for humans to underestimate them.

-Erik (2008)
There is nothing that says mold can't pave the way for bacterial synergism. We know that it does for actinomycetes.

-Erik (2010)

I wonder if cyanobacteria sometimes get the right conditions to partner with mold colonies?

Might this be responsible for the super-small "killer sourcepoints" we have run into?

-Erik (2015)

**MULTIPLE TOXINS**

I've had totally different reactions to the very same mold colony.

-Erik (2015)

**WHITE MOLD**

> A friend has some kind of white mold or maybe a bacteria growing on just about everything he owns. He can't get rid of it.

I heard the same thing.

White. Grows outside too... all over the place.

Doesn't appear to be particularly toxic, but weird. Nobody remembers seeing this before.

-Erik (2010)
Until I started a strategy of extreme mold inhalation avoidance, I had to give up alcohol. Red wine in particular seemed to knock me flat with killer headaches.

It was easy to test the variance in the effects of alcohol by simply drinking the same amount (lots) in a moldy environment and then doing the same out in the woods.

A Moldie friend was stunned to learn the difference, and exclaimed upon all the times she had woken up feeling drunk and hung over in a moldy place even with no alcohol.

And yet, out in the boondocks, we could get perfectly blasted with no morning-after residual effects.

This is such an easy test to perform. No doctors, no lab work, and no need to wonder. Just go out and do it yourself, and then you know!

-Erik (2008)
ALLERGIES

Dr. Marinkovich said my mold allergies were off the charts.

Too high to register.

However, I had done experiments that told me my problem was more of a toxicity than an allergy.

I banked on this as my primary problem.

I think I made a good choice.

-Erik (2015)

ALTITUDE SICKNESS

I just chose Whitney as a symbol, and it's the altitude that really gets people more than just the effort involved. It's very doable when the exercise intolerance is gone.

Exercise capacity is back to 100% as long as I avoid mold consistently. I do it in one day. Twenty-two miles and 5,000 altitude gain. My record time is nine hours.

I did this to make a compelling statement about a clue to the nature of the illness that others simply could not ignore.

There have been so many fluke recoveries and snake oil stories that I know it's hard to trust anyone, but you can't fake walking out of the Ampligen program and having results like this.

-Erik (2006)

*

Mold avoidance was a process, not an instant fix.

When I first began this process, I thought that I would have to move to a lower elevation. I just wasn't getting enough air at Tahoe altitude.

Much to my amazement, after six months of concerted avoidance, I could breathe again and altitude had no effect on me.

-Erik (2006)
I was shocked to “get clear” and find that respiratory problems and altitude sickness gradually disappeared.

I wouldn’t recommend going straight to a mountain and trying to climb anything immediately. Any recovery takes time.

But mountains have been places where I, and the Moldies I’ve taken with me, always feel the best, thanks to low ambient toxigenic mold levels.

-Erik (2006)

I suffered my whole life from altitude sickness until I discovered that cross-contaminated clothing made all the difference in the world.

One of my trips up Mt. Whitney, I didn’t take particular care to control contamination and that was the only time I started to suffer from the altitude. The other six times were no problem at all.

-Erik (2006)

I feel awesome on top of Mt Whitney.

Like a superman! No altitude sickness at all.

There are people all around with blinding headaches, numb, cold, and turning back because they can’t hang out at this altitude...and I’m doing great. No sign of any altitude problem.

-Erik (2007)

When I was growing up, I always had altitude sickness.

Back when Dr. Peterson told me I was pretty much doomed, I was thinking that I couldn’t live at Tahoe altitude anymore and that I might last a bit longer if I moved down lower.

Some people did just that, and it did seem to help.
So, imagine my amazement when after six months of acting like a mold maniac, I had no altitude problems at all. None.

In fact, it's like I do better at high altitude, which may be in line with some of Dr. Cheney's hypotheses about oxygen transfer.

But I wasn’t that way without mold avoidance. Nope. I was gonna die.

So now, here I am in my decrepit old age, climbing up to 14,500 feet whenever I want, with nary a trace of altitude sickness.

I see all these kids up on the summit laid out with headaches, gasping for air, having to get started back down quickly, because the longer they stay the worse they get...and these kids are in better shape than me!

So, I can't help but think that, as healthy as they look, perhaps they could learn a trick or two from this old mold dog.

-Erik (2008)

**ANTIBODIES**

Stimulate antibodies to greater efforts at recognition of the antigen, and it is a plus.

But if you enhance the innate immune system to a higher level of inflammation, then increased susceptibility to anaphylaxis is your reward.

Therein lies the rub.

-Erik (2015)

**ASPERGILLOSIS**

From all I've heard, Stachy can't actually grow in tissue, but Aspergillus can. Especially A. Flavus. And the trichothecenes from Stachy are protein synthesis inhibitors which shut down immune function so that Aspergillus can get a foothold where it might not otherwise.

This is where a lot of doctors made their mistake.
Normally Aspergillus isn't pathogenic enough to get going on its own, so they treated each Aspergillus infection as a fluke and didn't really think to look at some other mold toxin which might be acting as an enabler.

-Erik (2008)

“AT REST”

The words "at rest" throw the whole thing upside down and backwards.

When I was at rest, I was in a moldy place and having my worst symptoms. It was when I was outside trying to get my butt out of this that I felt less affected.

Remember the part of the CFS definition that says "not alleviated by rest"?

What I was describing was more like "exacerbated when at rest."

-Erik (2008)

BLOOD PRESSURE

Someone I taught mycotoxin avoidance to had to change to a different doctor’s office to get an accurate blood pressure reading because the office was contaminated.

-Erik (2003)

COFFEE

When I was in the bad zone, coffee would knock me for a loop.

Funny, I can drink the stuff all day long now.

Except if I go back into the zone on a bad plumage day, more than three cups will give me the shakes.

-Erik (2008)
COUGH

When the plumes are acting up, say, in Truckee, Reno or Spanish Springs, I noticed that not only do I get a chronic cough, so do a bunch of others around me.

Funny how people never connect the simultaneity. Each person passes it off as, "It's just me" even while others around them are coughing.

I just drive up north a few miles to get out of the plumes, and the cough disappears like magic.

-Erik (2008)

ECHOCARDIOGRAM

Joe Salowitz list made a terrific observation about the difficulty a technician had in performing an echocardiogram after a mold slam, and the technician apparently knew about this free-radical effect.

Amazing!

It looks like Joe has really hit on something, as he also included information about a testing method called "The Aerocrine system" which can detect this in asthma sufferers.

-Erik (2009)

EMF SENSITIVITY

The EMF sensitivity was the first symptom that backed off after I really got nutso about mold avoidance.

-Erik (2009)

FACIES

>I had rashes on my face when living in the mold, and my eyes would swell.

Dr. Shoemaker calls it "mold facies."
Sounds like a cutesy name for a rash on someone’s face, but it's actually a medical term.

-Erik (2006)

>

My nose and the area around my nose swells.

Hurts like your nose is going to fall off, doesn't it? Do you get that really red area just above the bridge of the nose, right between the eyes?

-Erik (2006)

*

I just got a call from a Moldie who said her symptoms had suddenly shifted to burning lips.

This gets to the point where you just gotta ask, “Is there anything that doesn't hurt?”

-Erik (2008)

FATIGUE

We simply do not have words to describe it.

"Crushing fatigue" is the closest that most people come. "Unable to move" is common, but once doctors hear that, they think, "Too tired to move."

Once they fixate on the first description they heard, it is almost impossible to revert them back to thinking, "Really unable to move."

I agree that there is a great deal of the sensation one could describe as fatigue, but that is not the primary complaint. Doctors don't understand that losing your ability to do math, getting lost on your way home and not being able to write legibly may seem like trivial things, but that they actually are the important things.

And this is why allergists know nothing about mycotoxins and cannot help anyone who says that mold is killing them. Yes, there is a component of mold allergy but it is not the important component.
So doctors derailed themselves by not taking all of the details into account.

-Erik (2008)

**FEET**

> It is only my ankles that swell, not my feet, so I don't think it is caused by a circulation problem as such.

I had that exact problem with the ankles swelling when getting mold exposures.

Sometimes the swelling would extend down to the top of my feet so the skin would appear perfectly flat.

-Erik (2004)

**FINGERPRINTS**

The fingerprint loss isn't totally apparent unless you do an ink smudge. The lines are still there, but the prints come out flattened with less and less distinction until they become meaningless.

The tips of the fingers and toes become itchy and have a strange shiny quality. I suspect that some people probably have degraded fingerprints but haven't tested themselves to see if they are disappearing.

I got them back after I started practicing mycotoxin avoidance and achieved a restoration of perfusion.

-Erik (2005)

* 

There were a few odd times when CFS’ers would have some need to be fingerprinted, and the difficulty trying to get a print was startling and memorable to people who were skilled at taking fingerprints.

The fingertips would get a burning sensation and gradually become smooth and shiny. And then the ridges would be too flat to get a print.

People who saw this instantly leaped to the conclusion that it was peripheral necropathy from poor circulation.
But here's the weird part. It was the index and middle finger that would be the most affected first, instead of the smaller fingers.

Since everyone seems to agree that circulation would affect the little finger the most, it seemed contrary that this would be the last finger to retain decent prints.

-Erik (2007)

*

The weird thing about the skin coming off the fingers and toes was the way the little fingers and toes were affected the last and least.

That was exactly the opposite progression to what you'd expect, if the problem were purely circulation.

And when the skin was gone, the fingertips were red, shiny and devoid of fingerprints.

Pretty crazy to do mold avoidance and have the fingerprints gradually come back.

Took about a year.

But they are still exceptionally smooth. Markedly different from how they are supposed to be.

-Erik (2008)

*

>My fingertips feel like they're burning.

Isn't it happening to your toes, too?

And take note of the peculiarity that the largest fingers (and toes) seem to be the worst.

-Erik (2009)

**FLU SEASON**

I noticed in 1999 that the "flu season" corresponded to times of mycotoxin release and started telling people that it was no coincidence.

-Erik (2003)
FOOD SENSITIVITIES

I saw a study a couple of years ago that even momentary exposure to Stachy altered intestinal flora.

That was on the Defunct MoldAutismFungal Research list.

I can just say from my personal experience that I tried everything I could afford to improve intestinal function, and though a few cleanses and probiotics seemed to help a bit, they didn’t have a fraction of the effect that getting out of the mold zone did.

Avoidance cleared up my digestive problems, so I am prepared to believe that this is a very significant factor in chronic mycotoxin illness.

While in Moldville I had to give up drinking wine, eating cheese, bread, nuts. It seemed like everything was making me sick. And people kept blaming it on the food.

Now I eat any damn thing I want and it feels great!

Changing my diet (which everybody thought was so important) meant nothing.

Changing my location meant everything.

-Erik (2002)

*

Six years ago, when I was really sick and in the Ampligen screening protocols, I couldn’t tolerate any of the foods likely to be contaminated with mycotoxins.

But extreme avoidance of airborne mycotoxins lessened my reactivity and I don’t have problems with any foods at all now.

-Erik (2004)

*

I never had noticeable problems with gluten until mold illness set in.

But since doctors don’t believe in mold illness, when that genetic susceptibility was unveiled from biotoxin exposure, doctors only looked at "the car on the bridge" instead of the agent which undermined the ability of the structure to carry the same load that it supported prior to being triggered.

Dr. Shoemaker has determined that the celiac alleles are on the same pathway and initiated by a cytokine cascade.
The amazing thing is that extreme mycotoxin avoidance allowed me to revert to my old beer-drinking, bread-eating ways.

As soon as I had the capacity to return to my former life in any way, I went right back to those behaviors that people implicated as being causative - despite the long history of these factors utterly failing to result in CFS in any consistent or noticeable way in the past.

Despite my lack of discipline, the anomaly remains that the biotoxin exposure appeared to be the more critical factor.

I feel like someone who became hyperreactive to peanuts.

As we all know, you can’t induce this type of reactivity by eating too many peanuts. So as soon as I found the agent which modulated that downstream response, I went right back to enjoying my peanut butter sandwiches as I had always done before.

It’s back to the bridge analogy.

As much as people tell me not to neglect the cars on the bridge, I keep wanting to restore as many stresses and stressors to my life as possible - for this is the condition that others refer to as "normal life."

-Erik (2006)

*

Not all peanuts are mistreated, poorly processed and full of aflatoxins.

The first time I climbed Whitney after leaving the Ampligen program to pursue mycotoxin avoidance, my partners carried Power Bars while I ate peanut butter sandwiches and trail mix.

All the Power Bar eaters were doubled over with stomach cramps after the hike, while I had no problems at all.

Mycotoxin avoidance doesn't mean automatically excluding all foods which may have mold, only those that do.

-Erik (2006)

*

Before going all-out in staying away from inhalation exposures, I tried avoiding foods that were said to contain mold. It did nothing to alleviate my condition.
I switched to avoiding inhalation exposures alone, and now I can eat anything.

A couple of years ago, I saw it again. A friend was absolutely convinced that she had wheat allergies and went on a restrictive diet, which did help. But when she got out and got to a good place, the diet became unnecessary.

As Dr. Shoemaker describes in Mold Warriors, ionophore toxins switch on latent genetic tendencies which mimic real genetic illnesses.

It’s hard to believe, but if the genetic programming for a reactivity are not being expressed, there is no need to avoid the trigger - for the body no longer sees it as something it should attack.

Kinda like a peanut allergy person being restored to a state of non-reactivity, and being able to eat PBJ’s with no more harm than is considered customary.

-Erik (2008)

*

I helped a friend move out of a mold zone three years ago, and boy! Was it a pain. I hated to go into that area, but this is a long-time friend.

(This was the gal who stepped outside one day and spoke the immortal words, “The air here is poison.”)

She had become increasingly reactive to gluten. Based on how much better she felt on a strict diet which eliminated wheat and gluten, she felt totally confirmed that she had celiac disease.

Of course, I told her all about that chapter in Mold Warriors which describes how the differential regulation of genes can mimic leaky gut and celiac sprue, but the words just seemed lost on her.

She reached the firm conclusion that she had true celiac disease because avoiding gluten decreased her symptoms and re-introducing it exacerbated her problems again.

And she certainly knew that when she returned from work, she sat down and barely had the strength to prepare a meal, and couldn’t stay awake long enough to even watch a movie.

When I drew the parallels between her progressive debilitation and my own mold situations, pointing out that she had never been reactive to gluten before occupying this mold house, she started to get mad at me: "I am talking about emotional stress from work and a genetic gluten intolerance, and you keep wanting to change the subject to mold.”
I gave up trying to explain it and just helped her move out to a new place that feels absolutely great to me.

She called me from her new digs after a couple of months: "You know, it's funny, but my gluten intolerance has gone away and I'm back to eating whatever I want with no problem."

I just said, "That's great! Congratulations."

-Erik (2008)

*

In Mold Warriors, Dr. Shoemaker describes that the cellular response to the presence of these ionophore toxins is to release a blast of inflammatory cytokines - which, in turn, flip on the anti-gliadin antibodies, anti-cardiolipin antibodies, or anti-myelin basic protein antibodies based upon whatever HLA DR genetic profile you happen to have.

So the leaky gut is apparently not exactly a direct response to the toxins, but rather is a process that is mediated by the inflammatory response to the presence of toxins.

Many years ago, I remember my shock when a friend suddenly acquired wheat intolerance overnight.

"But why would someone suddenly get a genetic illness?" I asked.

"The doctors don't know," he said. "But I guess my beer-drinking days are over."

Pretty wild to think that if one can stay away from mold successfully, the genetic switch can actually be flipped back to the "I can go back to drinking beer with no problems" position.

-Erik (2008)

*

I developed all the classic reactions to wine, cheese, nuts, coffee and the rest.

But it was all totally secondary to inhaled mold.

All doctors and experts tried to tell me it was the other way around, that I must reduce ingested mycotoxins to lose my sensitivity to bad houses.

Nope.
They have it exactly backwards.

Now I eat cheese, nuts and drink cheap red wine too.

-Erik (2015)

**GALLBLADDER PROBLEMS**

Yes, we know about this gallbladder weirdness. It's the enterohepatic release of ionophore toxins through the organic ion transport system.

By ion transport system, I was thinking of the anion organic transport system which is a special avenue the body possesses for getting rid of these problematic types of toxins.

So it's not really the cause or the effect. More of conduit of egress for wherever those toxins came from: Lyme, pfiesteria, mold, whatever.

-Erik (2008)

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Up until the gallbladders came out, people were excited for the surgery, as doctors said that this would fix the problem.

After we saw the adverse consequences, we realized the doctors were wrong, and everyone fought to keep theirs from then on.

We speculated there is a function to tonsils that doctors don't understand, in some way an avenue of detox, otherwise why were they so diseased in us?

After the gallbladder fails, everyone in Incline did a gall bladder flush.

Including me.

We went through this with the gallbladders, and again with the tonsils.

Doctors saw how rotted our tonsils were and were convinced that removing them might be all it takes for someone to recover.

People were so excited and rushed to have their tonsils out.
Only then did we see people fail to recover as predicted, and perhaps even get a bit worse.

-Erik (2015)

HAIR

In a moldy place, my skin became, well, greasy. It was pretty disgusting, and went right along with losing so much hair when showering that I would clog up the drain every time.

After a shower, it looked like a mouse was sitting on the drain. That's how much hair I was losing. I thought I'd be bald inside of another few months.

Just imagine how amazing it was to get going on mold avoidance and keep the hair, lose the grease, and no more rashes on the face.

-Erik (2008)

HEADACHES

Years ago, I used to resort to aspirin for my blinding God awful headaches. Now I decontaminate before they get going and haven't had to use any headache remedies at all for six years.

In a world where headaches are a big problem and big business, you'd think that someone else on this planet would be interested in this little peculiarity.

-Erik (2006)

LOGIC

If people have no problems seeing logical decision making impeded by alcohol, shouldn't we accord neurotoxins the same ability?

Some behaviors that are often considered to be primarily maladaptive thought processes actually may be a direct result of neurotoxicity.

I agree with cautions about falsely advising a positive outlook, as this tends to de-emphasize the severity of the situation.
Sometimes the prognosis is extremely pessimistic, and failure to present a dire circumstance might lead people to delay taking more aggressive action.

There are many factors to balance, when giving advice.

Speaking of which, "often getting sick" after an investigation is a sign of impending ACTH depletion.

If you've read *Mold Warriors*, and know what happens when both MSH and ACTH are finally exhausted.

Well, let's just say, it's very dire.

-Erik (2008)

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One of the most incredible neurological effects that I have consistently observed from chronic mold exposure victims are dissonant interpretations of statements.

It's as if the fight-or-flight mechanism is so acutely activated that every stimulus, both physical and mental, is perceived as a contradictory challenge.

I have taken people out to the wilderness for extended periods and observed restoration of conversational equilibrium.

I believe that a recognizable pattern of communicative disproportionalism may very well be a consistent and recognizable feature of chronic neurotoxicity.

-Erik (2009)

**LYME**

During the famous 1985 "Lake Tahoe Mystery Illness," I noticed that the only discrete known illness where people were as reactive to moldy places as the Tahoe Mystery Illness were Lyme patients.

I had an illness onset in the Army in the mid 1970's which was classic for Lyme.

So I've never bothered to argue that I don't have it.
Dr. Peterson tested us all for Lyme, but we were negative, on the testing of that time, which we know to be not quite accurate.

- Erik (2015)

*

Doctors ran me completely out of money.

But I've been in many special studies by Simmaron Research, Whittemore Peterson Institute, Lipkin and others.

You'd think they would have been eager to poke around in my blood for spirochetes.

But they never admit finding any.

- Erik (2015)

**READING**

I used to read voraciously. Reading was great pleasure for me.

Ever since the Incline Village phenomenon, I take no joy in reading the way I used to. It is nothing but hard work. Nothing like it was.

If I am out in the woods, in a really good environment, I can almost....almost...

If I could stay in a pristine place forever, without having to dip in and out of mold zones, I feel sometimes that I could just about get the pleasure of reading back. But I haven't had that opportunity.

- Erik (2008)

**SLEEP**

It is absolutely terrific to be able to sleep well, without all those nasty neuro-nightmares.

- Erik (2006)

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Remember the "Shrieking Dream Response" that correlates to neurotoxin exposure?
I complimented Dr. Shoemaker that he was perspicacious enough to notice that patients often mentioned it.

I told Dr. Shoemaker that my leap of faith was to consider that this is a normal animal response to toxic situations, and is the attempt of the immune system to induce a meaningful response:

Fight or Flight.

(You can't fight a dream, so that only leaves the other option.)

 Trouble is, humans try to flee in their minds, without using their legs, as any ordinary animal with no common sense would do.

By moving my MECU in and out of toxin zones, I was able to make a positive correlation with neurotoxic exposure and the “Shrieking Dream Response.”

-Erik (2008)

*

As long as my sleep area is free of neurotoxicants to the point of allowing regenerative REM sleep, I have been able to build up enough tolerance to operate in what would otherwise be completely unacceptable buildings.

Rather than being a sacrifice that prevents interaction, it was the reverse.

Extreme avoidance is a trade-off that allows more.

-Erik (2015)

**SMELL**

I can well remember my sense of smell literally disappearing. I brewed myself strong cups of hot chocolate, and hovered above them, trying hard to gain some sense of delicious flavor.

Nothing!

-Erik (2008)
SMOKE

It wouldn't have been too difficult to convince Dr. Klein about that cigarette smoke phenomenon. He was wildly reactive and had to avoid wood smoke as well.

But the interesting part is that in the course of his work as an orthopedic surgeon, he was also similarly reactive to the electro-cauterization smoke from burning human tissue.

So none of the compounds inherent to cigarette smoke was the culprit.

If one wanted to construct a study, it seems to me that the starting point would be an attempt to find out what, if anything, these disparate triggers might have as a common element.

-Erik (2008)

SORE THROATS

> I'm beginning to think that my sore throats could be my mold indicator as they occur very quickly. I suffer from asthma. Would that be a reason why I get the sore throats so quickly?

This appears to be from exhalation of powerful nitric oxide radicals produced in the lungs.

The radicals occur immediately upon the exhale.

But it usually takes a bit of time to really inflame the throat, so I'm surprised that your response is quicker than other indicators.

I guess asthma is the thing.

In my case, the sore throat takes too long to use as an indicator,

-Erik (2009)

SUPERNATURAL ATTRIBUTIONS

It does seem to me that a significant number of sufferers attribute their problems to metaphysical phenomena.
I initially assumed that this must be merely the attempt to grasp at a nonscientific explanation in the face of a situation that medical professionals claim cannot exist, but there may be additional factors which strongly influence this conclusion.

The mind will always attempt to make sense of a situation. In the lack of a logical explanation, theories tend to cover a very broad range of suspected possibilities, from the logical to the absurd.

People suffering from neurotoxic syndromes suffer from extremely vivid dream states while simultaneously experiencing a reduction in high-order "executive function" type mental processes: a lapse in logical faculties.

In the throes of neurotoxicity, a decreased threshold in mental function may allow assimilations of rationalizations which might otherwise be rejected.

Rather than debate or directly challenge metaphysical explanations, I simply offer the possibility that the "presence" one senses might actually be the attempt of the mind to project substantive recognition to a subliminal fight-or-flight inducing neurotoxic threat from a very real unseen danger.

And add that this is just my belief system about what is going on.

- Erik (2008)

* 

I think this is a terrific subject.

People's attribution of symptomology to supernatural causes does not appear to fit the normal psychological profile of paranoia.

The metaphysical descriptions that I have heard tend to sound more like an earnest desire to explain a phenomenon that, having been discredited by "science," becomes automatically subsumed by the paranormal.

Why not consider the possibility that a combination of neurotoxicity and subsequent unveiling of a willingness to make supernatural attributions might just be responsible for some haunted mansions?

We've got a model for this type of human response in the mycotoxin ergotism hypothesis for the Salem Witch Trials.

People had a chance to suspect poison, but opted for a metaphysical explanation instead.

- Erik (2008)
SWELLING

When I get hit with the Truckee substance, my feet swell up.

It is a sign that I have to "amp up" avoidance a notch.

So far, this has never failed to reverse it.

-Erik (2015)

*

It took me six months of heavy-duty sweating in the desert before my hands and legs stopped swelling.

-Erik (2015)

TEMPERATURE INTOLERANCE

After six months of concerted mycotoxin avoidance, my problems with thermal dysregulation disappeared.

My fingers had no reaction to the cold. A miracle!

That was eight years ago.

The only time it started to return was when, due to unfortunate circumstances, I knowingly allowed myself to fall under a level of exposure that I knew to be enough to make me relapse.

But I could feel it creeping back and reverted to my extreme mold avoidance strategy, and again exerted an amazing degree of control over this phenomenon.

-Erik (2006)

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I guess it was about 1999, after continually attempting to refine avoidance techniques, that suddenly my hands felt warm.

It was like a switch. Something kicked. This wasn't gradual improvement. It was like night and day.
I ran outside and shoved my hands in the snow. No Raynaud’s, no blanching, no purple finger chilblains, like a normal person.

I couldn't believe it. This was the first time my hands had felt normally warm since the Incline Village "mystery illness" epidemic.

To test if this was as good as it felt, and to celebrate this amazing thing, I stood outside and made snowballs for a half hour.

Nothing had ever helped before, but mold avoidance did.

-Erik (2010)

VERTIGO

The severe vertigo, photophobia and photosensitive epileptic seizures were the very first symptoms to disappear. Long, long ago.

When I fell under the power curve again in 1994-1997, the vertigo was coming back, but not the photophobia or seizures.

-Erik (2008)

VIRAL REACTIVATION

When I was working in a restaurant next door to Dr. Peterson’s office, we were getting spore plumed by mold.

Thanks to being hypersensitive, I was aware of this while people of lesser reactivity were clueless regarding this variable.

Much to my amazement, every employee who had herpes broke out simultaneously. I don't have herpes, but I felt horrible all the same.

When the weather changed and the plume died down, so did people’s herpes infections.

It was amazing to see the correlation between mold exposure and viral exacerbation.

All the people with flare-ups out said their lesions were nothing more than cold sores, until their breakouts got so bad that they could no longer deny that this was indeed herpes simplex type 2.
I had no idea that so many people I worked with had HSV until they all broke out simultaneously at the same time the mold became particularly bad in that building.

-Erik (2006)

*

I saw viral infections of all kinds emerge in people when a mold colony acts up and plumes the place.

I even know a medical lab technician working in a moldy CFS clinic who started becoming ill after working there. Fearful of CFS, he began running his own EBV titers and saw his viral load inexorably climbing as time went along.

None of the doctor’s remedies were altering the course of his slippery slide into full blown EBV reactivation.

(How often do you find a clue like that?)

Last I heard, the doctor was trying to break his lease and move his clinic. But in the meantime, employees are forbidden to spend time in the worst affected areas of the clinic.

-Erik (2008)

*

Nothing like taking a mold slam at the very places that started CFS to convince people that this stuff might just be what reactivated all those viruses.

-Erik (2015)

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From what I have seen, the TH1/TH2 shift can go either way.

Some who never got a cold or flu for years suddenly switched and catch everything. What remains a constant is that they cannot tolerate the mystery substance.

-Erik (2015)
VISION

> When I am in an area that I believe to contain some sort of contamination, things are blurry to read.

Yes, you just got an indicator of a mold hit.

Not enough to be a full upregulation, or slam, but enough to let you know that you got swatted by a bit of mold.

-Erik (2006)

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When I was at my worst, everything appeared so dim that I needed a flashlight to read - during the day.

It was bad enough at all times, but when my face got close to a contaminated object, it would get insanely worse.

I got some oxygen, but it didn't seem to help me at all. The dimming felt like I was hypoxic, similar to high altitude in a sailplane, so oxygen was the natural choice.

But the oddity that it didn't help is borne out by Dr. Shoemaker’s concepts of low VEGF, which cuts off circulation in the microcapillaries.

Doesn't matter if the blood is oxygenated or not, if it can't get to the tissue.

So damping down inflammatory response takes precedence over oxygen delivery.

-Erik (2008)
Death Valley National Park in southeastern California.

Chapter 35

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

MOLD AND CHEMICALS

Molds produce mycotoxins.

Mycotoxins are chemicals.

Mycotoxin reactivity is chemical sensitivity.

-Erik (2004)

Certainly chemicals kick people’s butts, but when someone gets away from that particular exposure and the horrific immunological attack just keeps going on and on,
why not consider the possibility that an unsuspected but very prevalent toxin is what is keeping the response going?

This one mold reactivity stood out as a specificity.

I just concentrated on it - and much to my amazement, the other sensitivities just faded away.

-Erik (2006)

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I had become reactive to many chemicals, more and more as time went along. This is a process well known to MCS'ers, called spreading.

As I moved from place to place, I was reactive to different substances in different places, and they all had an equal effect.

It's just that I remembered that my problems had started with mold, so I attempted to treat that as my primary.

This is something that MCS'ers never do, as they only track their illness back to the chemical exposure that they believe triggered their illness.

Since I had mold problems prior to chemical problems, I shifted my focus to mold.

What I found was that no amount of chemical avoidance abated my reactivities.

But mold avoidance alone reduced them all.

Any MCS'er would clearly understand and expect that avoiding the primary chemical would have this effect.

What they missed for all these years is that biotoxins from mold are chemicals.

The MCS community thought that we Moldies were just complaining about a bad mold allergy.

So I just thought it was kind of interesting that no amount of trying to avoid all these various chemicals did anything to reduce my all my chemical reactivities, yet when I concentrated my efforts on mold avoidance, eventually it did make a difference.

That's why I told Dr. Peterson, "There is a specificity to this one irritant" and asked that it be investigated.
But up until Dr. Shoemaker, this didn't make sense to anyone, as they all seemed to think that, "All toxins are equal."

Dr. Shoemaker found that the C4A complement activation says that the body does indeed react as if mold is something pretty special.

-Erik (2009)

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My belief is that jet fuel was not "behaving toxic" until people had a mold incident.

The specificity of aftermath of Stachybotrys warrants placing it as a high priority prime mover.

-Erik (2015)

*

If my home is free of mold contamination, I can't feel EMF's at all.

-Erik (2015)

**MCS ABATEMENT**

I managed to resolve my non-mycotoxin chemical sensitivities and have no further problems with carpets, perfume, Home Depot or any of the other chemical exposures that used to drop me in my tracks.

All I had to do was stay away from mold and the other problems just disappeared.

Now I drive a diesel truck, work right here at this computer that used to knock me flat, and have no problems driving past the auto paint shops which I had to detour around.

Perhaps that's not "getting rid of MCS," but it's good enough for me.

-Erik (2004)

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When I first started this avoidance thing, I was so reactive that I couldn't stand just about everything. Dr. Peterson said I was a universal reactor. I remember having problems with trees, diesel, new cars, paint, carpet, outgassing plastics, stores.
It was overwhelming.

This focus on mold was just a wild leap because I remembered that it was the very first thing I became reactive to - and that all the clues seemed to point at specific molds as primary in my chronic inflammatory response.

I was amazed at how many other irritants ceased to be important if I only stay away from mold well enough. I can even enjoy perfume again.

The only exception is after I've been mold hit. Once my immune system is upregulated, I become more MCS again and places like the carpet department in Home Depot will start to get to me.

After I decontaminate the mold, I can turn right around and go to the very same places without any trouble.

-Erik (2005)

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>When you use the word abatement, you don’t mean cured do you? Because I recall you still can be affected by MCS.

a·bate·ment. Diminution in amount, degree, or intensity; moderation. The amount lowered; a reduction.

"Abatement" seems to fit my situation perfectly as I find them to be vastly reduced, without making the claim that I am now completely immune at all times.

My chemical reactivities had gradually increased over several years by spreading, extending to more irritants until, as Dr. Peterson told me, "Life has become intolerable for you."

I was only hoping to reduce the primary exacerbation that I had always connected with mold.

I had no idea that by focusing on mold, my other chemical irritants would cease to be a major driving force in my illness. The secondary reactivities abated in the reverse order of appearance as a result of mold avoidance.

I was surprised, but very happy that I went in this direction.

I don't use the word "cured" because even though these chemicals no longer seem to bother me as they once did, if I am exposed to mycotoxins the other chemical reactivities soon begin to manifest again - scarcely a "cure."
The interesting thing about mold avoidance was just that it really helped when I had run out of other things to try.

Not a guarantee. Not something I can say will apply to everyone, only a last ditch strategy that got me some results when nothing else did.

-Erik (2006)

OTHER MCS SUFFERERS

If I take an MCS'er to a mold exposure and they respond, that's an indication that they are specifically reactive and cannot afford to overlook mycotoxins as a driving force in their illness.

The fact is that many MCS'ers are failing to control for mold and mycotoxin exposure because doctors have them convinced that molds are an allergy.

I did the same thing too, until I couldn't listen to them anymore and pointed at specific molds saying, "These are slamming me just like chemicals. Are you certain that they are not?"

They were quite certain. Fortunately for me, I didn't believe them.

-Erik (2006)

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A Moldie friend suffered from chronic eye pain and increasing chemical sensitivities.

Her eyes kept getting worse and her opthamologist prescribed eye drops. She kept swearing to him that the eye drops intensified her pain, but he insisted that this was impossible. So she kept using them.

After she progressed to the point where she had almost lost her sight, he consulted with his colleagues who all agreed that her attribution of eye drop exacerbation was without basis and just something that she had mentally seized upon as a result of her hysterical distress at having an infection that was not responding to treatment. He recommended increased use of these same eye drops.

Out of sheer desperation, she started researching the eye drops herself and found that a vastly increasing percentage of the population is suffering from an intense reactivity to the preservative used in some brands of eye drops - benzalkonium chloride, a substance considered to be so utterly safe and innocuous that it wasn't even listed as an ingredient.
A call to the manufacturer revealed that this was indeed the preservative being used.

Benzalkonium chloride has since been implicated in masking and enabling ocular infections in a significant percentage of patients - a peculiarity that is better known among groups of chemically damaged persons than among ophthamologists, who adhere to the manufacturers' claims that it is not proven to be harmful except perhaps for a few individual flukes who can only blame themselves for a reaction to a substance that is harmless to most people.

The interesting part is that after a few years of mold avoidance, she had another encounter with BC and the reaction was far less. My friend remains unconvinced that her prior reactivity to BC was exaggerated and has reached the conclusion that mold avoidance had an unexpected effect in decreasing her response to this chemical.

Naturally, this has been met with total disbelief by her doctors.

Since I had the experience of chemical sensitivities abating as a result of mold avoidance, I see no particular reason to doubt her.

-Erik (2006)

**A CYTOKINE STORM**

If you were a mold responder and were chronically exposed to an environmental irritant of which you were unaware and then had a cytokine storm, this just might “strip the MSH/ACTH gears.”

From that point on, even though you might be doing everything possible to control for manmade chemicals, it might be insufficient if you were still exposed to the neurotoxic molds which were now the main driving force in your continued inflammatory response.

Once the infection or toxic exposure overwhelms and depletes the capacity of the hypothalamus to compensate for toxic exposure, it is the genetic susceptibility to mycotoxins that is "unveiled."

This means that even though the initial chemical onslaught has been removed, the pro-inflammatory cytokines are still kept upregulated by the unmasked response to common and prevalent mold toxins.

Dr. Shoemaker says that this over-response is mediated by biotoxins - and that although it can be initiated by mycotoxins alone, this response also can be triggered by a number of different cytokine events.
This is far from claiming that mold is the cause of everything:

"Many SBS patients also begin to notice that they become more sensitive to fumes, smells and chemicals. With repeated exposures, the sensitivity for some becomes more pronounced. In the full-blown sensitive patient, someone with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), just a few seconds of smelling fumes is overwhelming. Mere seconds of "off-gassing" coming from computers and phones, new paint, new carpet, freshly printed reading material, or even just a ream of copy paper can make patients sick for weeks. Our treatment protocols for "Multiple Chemical Sensitivity" may bring order to this difficult-to-confirm diagnosis if the illness is caught quickly after it appears. To date, having seen over 500 MCS patients, I have yet to find one who wasn't made ill early in the illness by exposure to water-damaged buildings. I continue to look for sources of the origin of MCS other than mold exposure - so far without success."

-Page 53, "Why the Courthouse was Dangerous," Mold Warriors.

Now you have to look carefully at what Dr. Shoemaker is saying here. MCS’ers who had a triggering chemical exposure recoil and get angry at this paragraph because their perception is that this claims "mold is the cause of everything" - which is not the case.

If you read the entire book, what Dr. Shoemaker says that the HLA susceptibility to molds is unveiled by a cytokine storm from various infections and toxic exposures.

So different triggers unleash the inflammatory overkill and the biotoxins - which include mycotoxins - then become the chronic mediators of the illness.

Perhaps the chemically sensitized patient managed to successfully avoid the exposure that initially unleashed the illness, but if he has the genetic susceptibility for cytokine storm from mycotoxins, the immune system is kept upregulated by a completely different, ubiquitous and difficult to avoid toxin.

-Erik (2006)
Chapter 36

Increasing Tolerance

LIFE IS MUCH BETTER NOW

Ritchie Shoemaker calls a response that lasts more than a few hours a "mold slam." The lesser ones are just "hits."

When I first started a concerted mycotoxin avoidance strategy in 1998, slams would make me sick for three or four days. Now my tolerance is up to a level in which even the very worst places have been reduced to hits.

I am never sick for more than an hour now. I'm even working full time in a building where I formerly couldn't stand momentary exposure...though if the Park Lane plume blows toward me I have to leave the area.

-Erik (2004)
After I left the Ampligen program, it took me six months of extreme avoidance to improve.

I couldn't measure the recovery by comparing symptoms over hours. I had to look at weeks.

But after getting to a higher level on the power curve, it takes me only minutes to improve after a neuroinflammatory exposure.

-Erik (2005)

There have been a few pretty good plumes recently that made me bail out for a while, but if I get 'em in time and hoist myself out to the boondocks, I really only have to resort to this a few times a month.

Amazed how much tolerance I've built up.

-Erik (2008)

I found that by a consistent strategy of avoidance and decontamination that I was able to build up my tolerance beyond anything I dared hope for.

I am not nearly as cautious as I used to be, so I'm pretty sure my tolerance has massively improved.

Back in 1997, when I hit a really low point, I was worried that I might be stuck at that level of reactivity. Glad that wasn't the case, but I sure do have to watch it.

I now trapse all over the place and sure, I still have to watch it carefully to avoid falling below the power curve, but this is reclaiming more life than I thought that I was going to get.

I don't get all freaked out about bad buildings anymore.

I used to, you know. When I was moving various friends out of their houses, I had to park a long way away from their houses and use their cars, because I wouldn't take any chances of moving their stuff with my rig.

I am working full time in a place that I couldn't stand for 15 minutes, eight years ago.
I used to live in fear of even driving past Truckee High School, since the road is only a few hundred feet away. Contrast that with the way Lisa and I blazed right inside so Lisa could see the teachers’ lounge.

It’s amazing to go into places that I used to run from, knowing that I can stand it for a limited time - long enough to see a show, anyway - and still decontaminate before I get into serious trouble.

-Erik (2008)

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If I carry the response after any exposure, I decontaminate, no matter where that contamination came from.

If it dies away, I take this as an indication that I was only hit with VOC’s and not fungal detritus, and I often don't bother to decontaminate if I feel no lingering effects.

As I get higher on the power curve, I feel the need to decontaminate far less than I used to.

Places that used to feel horribly toxic are now fairly bearable.

I take this as further confirmation that although mold toxins are certainly becoming more toxic, a great portion of the way they felt toxic was primarily due to being so low on the curve and more susceptible.

I am going all kinds of places that used to scare me to death and hardly even having a problem anymore.

I don't have any problems at Home Depot now, not even the lumber, carpet or fertilizer sections.

Never thought that would happen.

Life is much better now.

-Erik (2009)

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I was worried about Reno for a long time, but my reactivity has died down so much that I have almost no problems here now.

Reno has been treating me pretty well these days.
So well that the whole mold thing is starting to feel like it was all just a bad dream.

I am nowhere close to being a severe reactor anymore.

-Erik (2015)

OTHERS’ IMPROVEMENTS

I've seen quite a few Moldies who struggle back up to a semblance of normalcy, but not a single one who ever went exactly back to where they were before.

-Erik (2009)
Chapter 37

Making Decisions

GOING EXTREME

I actually think of "extreme" as a behavioral paradigm shift, more than the technique itself.

People who are gradually realizing how much mold is problematic for them have a mindset of trying to reclaim their possessions and normal lives.

To me, "extreme" is when you realize that part of your life is over and that to achieve any real comfort, one must treat mold as if it were plutonium.

Yeah, extreme avoidance is way too extreme, until suddenly you make the decision that there is nothing more extreme than death.

-Erik (2010)

*

I got hit and slammed... beaten up for years, and it wasn't until I finally crashed and burned that I finally realized just how close to disaster I had come before.
And that made a much more attentive pilot, so my flights have been much smoother since then.

-Erik (2010)

*

I never isolated myself.

Just made a mold-free RV to live in and parked it in places that felt good to me.

-Erik (2015)

ALL MOLD RESPONDERS

The scope and variability of this illness is so complex that dealing with it requires an individualized strategy tailored to your own personal requirements.

People not only have different symptoms from each other, they also have different symptoms and levels of reactivity over time.

But it’s counterproductive to say, "We are all completely different and you cannot project your experience upon others."

The fact is that in some fundamental ways, we are very much the same.

We all have an extraordinary reactivity to mold.

We have to learn how to deal with it as best we can.

Staying away from mold is better than not.

If someone is steadily losing it due to exposure beyond their tolerance and all accessible therapies have failed to stop the decline, a more concerted effort at avoidance is all they have left to try.

When one is dealing with an exposure level that results in inexorable decline, taking measures sooner gives people a better chance at survival than waiting.

I feel pretty safe in saying that this applies to everyone who is a mold responder.

-Erik (2006)
PERSONAL IMPACT RATING

PIR, Personal Impact Rating, is a way that Carl Grimes developed to objectively assess just how seriously a person is affected.

A lot of people claim that they are severely afflicted, even though they haven't lost their jobs or crawled out to live in a tent.

So you can evaluate a person's statements about what type of actions they are forced to take and put their level of affliction - or "Personal Impact" - into an objective context.

This allows you to give advice based upon their individual circumstances.

-Erik (2006)

* You have to act in accordance with your perceptions and conduct avoidance to the degree that you feel is appropriate to your degree of distress.

Having people of all degrees of reactivity talking about their needs without regard to their Personal Impact Ratings leads to confusion and cross purposes of communication.

If someone has a PIR that allows them to stay alive in a specific house and they wish to stay, that is how they base their approach and their responses. It may well be the best option for them.

If someone with a higher PIR were to advise them immediate abandonment of all possessions and tenting in the desert, that would be talking at cross purposes.

As someone who was forced to live in the woods in a tent until the tent was contaminated and I had to abandon that too and sleep in the open, it sounds a bit strange to hear descriptions of concerns about affordable housing being the limitation governing actions. But one has to recognize that we are all at different levels.

At an extreme PIR, priorities are completely different.

When survival is at stake, affordability and comfort become relatively irrelevant.

Mold illness can really drive you to this level of desperation and leave you no other options for survival.

-Erik (2006)

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I don't think you will find anyone who was forced to run that didn't at some point think it was impossible and unrealistic to turn their life upside down and act like a crazy person.

Just as a person who is not reactive has difficulty understanding why anyone would bother about mold at all, it is difficult for someone at a lesser PIR to understand the dictates of a more extreme Personal Impact Rating.

None of us would live like this unless we had no other choice.

-Erik (2006)

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Whether or not you improve after leaving a building all depends on your Personal Impact Rating.

If your PIR is beyond that which can be dealt with by just leaving a sick building, it's time to move on to the next step - avoiding mold wherever it is.

This causes Carl to assess people at PIR 6, which is equivalent to requiring a tent out in the desert because nothing else seems to work....

That is, unless you can detect mold and avoid it with sufficient degree of refinement that you can successfully operate inside contamination zones which would be otherwise intolerable to you.

I'm PIR 6 except that my military training in biowarfare allowed me to evolve a strategy that enables me to survive inside towns by living in-between spore plumes by avoidance and decontaminating after passing through them.

I have been able to drop down to a PIR 4 by building up tolerance so I can work in a semi-bad building by shifting even more effort into compensating by sleeping in an exceptionally pristine safe zone.

If I weren't dodging mold plumes and decontaminating after passing through, virtually the only places left that would be safe for me would indeed be out in the woods or desert. But by getting these spores off before the immune system has a chance to upregulate, I can live in close proximity to mold plumes without fear.

-Erik (2006)

* 

I think it was back in 1998 when I was trying to develop a scale of intensity for places that slammed me and strategize what I wanted to do about it.
One place that usually immobilized me within an hour of exposure had inhabitants that were suffering from vague health problems but seemed to be hanging in there. The owner had heart problems and his wife was diagnosed with CFS.

One beautiful warm summer day, the owner was feeling particularly energetic and decided to tackle some chores around the house. He had detected a small water leak in the basement which was aggravating some mold growth, and so he got out his plumbing tools and crawled under the house.

Suddenly he felt so tired and weak that he couldn't even lift a pipe wrench. He crawled out from under the house, collapsed into a chair in the living room, and his heart just stopped.

Naturally, thanks to doctors who won't listen to clues, the cause of death was attributed to overexertion and weak heart.

But his widow is convinced that the way he felt so good right up until the instant of coming face to face with mold and then dropping is no coincidence. Perhaps his heart condition would have killed him eventually, but as far as we are concerned, it was mold.

So, just having a PIR that allows you to remain in a moldy house is no protection against an overwhelming exposure.

-Erik (2006)

* 

Personal Impact Rating is a 6 point scale based on the overall impact mold exposures have on your life.

PIR 1 - No impact.

PIR 2 - You recognize an impact and a need to do something, but are easily distracted and ignore it.

PIR 3 - It can't wait. You must do something now. But it is easily remedied and you can fairly quickly get back to a routine.

PIR 4 - You have no routine because you react to so many exposure sources so strongly that you are almost always sick, recovering from exposures or avoiding locations that have made you ill in the past. You experience many complaints, many doctors, many diagnoses and many treatment failures. The impact is disruptive and life altering. The remedy is life altering.

PIR 5 - Disability. You are too sick to work or take care of family, let alone yourself. Financial ruin is the rule.
PIR 6 - The dispossessed. They are the individuals who can get slight relief only by isolating themselves from as many exposures as possible. They live outside in tents or porcelain trailers, sometimes moving to high desert regions.

-Carl Grimes (2006)

AN OBJECT-BY-OBJECT BASIS

I bought a book at a flea market many years ago.

I opened it up for a read and it almost dropped me in my tracks.

I knew right away it had come from a mold-infested hell hole and tossed it. But I wanted to read that book so I went out and bought a new copy which gave me no problems at all.

It didn't matter if it was an "indoor" or an "outdoor" book either.

There was simply no way I could be near it.

I cannot survive near anything that has been contaminated in such a way. No remediologist can test an area and tell me if it is good for me. This is something I have to determine for myself on a moment to moment and object by object basis.

I see that many people have reached this level of reactivity and are still trying to live a normal life and recover in places where they perceive the presence of something that is beating their immune system’s potential for reactivity to death.

I have encountered people who have been slammed down to the point where they could no longer physically stand up or take any measures to avoid their mycotoxin "trigger."

If such people don't have someone who understands the problem and can remove them from such a level of exposure, their outlook is very bleak.

-Erik (2004)

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Cross contamination is a huge problem if you are living at an extreme level of sensitivity.

People who aren't sensitive don't remediate at all and go on with their lives.
Some people who catch this in time can get mold levels low enough to stay where they are.

Others can't bear to be in contact with so much as a single object brought out of badly contaminated place.

No individual's experience can act as a guide for all of these varying degrees of response.

Not only that, but each individual's reactivity changes over time, so what is an appropriate response at one level may be ineffective when that level changes.

There are factors of differential toxicity even within a single colony of the same species. It doesn't do much good to try to guess at how someone should respond when there is an ever changing and almost limitless variation in individual responses to molds which likewise have toxicity (even in Stachy) that ranges from non-toxic to highly pathogenic.

The only reasonable way I can see for people to construct a strategy that is relevant to their needs is to base it upon their own level of response.

-Erik (2004)

DESPERATION

There wasn't much room for compromise, at least, not in my situation. Partial measures didn't work.

It was down to a choice between trying to maintain a semblance of normal life by hanging on to all my stuff and be horribly ill, or leave it all behind and take a wild leap at feeling like a human but at an incredible cost.

Kind of like surviving a hurricane or a fire.

For me it was down to the fact that I had no choice left.

It was do something drastic or suffer drastically, so I had nothing to lose by going all out with this.

I just thought it was amazing that when all doctors had given up on me, there was still one thing left that got real results.

-Erik (2010)

*
I did everything within reason to fight this illness.

The only thing that really helped was something beyond reason.

The strategy involved taking steps that most people consider unacceptable. The things that people think are more reasonable tended not to have much effect... at least for me.

This strategy is probably only for those who are at the end of desperation and don't have other options. Except by then, the very fact of being too ill usually makes it impossible.

So this is something that is better started sooner than later, if at all possible.

-Erik (2010)

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Just like everyone else, I did my best to hang on to a normal life. I tried partial measure after partial measure, each time getting knocked down again and just losing more resources.

I finally said "To hell with this" and went all-out. Total extreme concerted avoidance.

Looking back over this whole mess, I can honestly say that what I considered to be the last resort would have saved me a crap load of money, time and health if it had been my first.

Erik (2011)

**BAILING OUT**

I found out that my house was located in a spore plume and that if the whole thing was burned to the ground and bulldozed out of existence, it still wouldn't have made any difference to how I felt there.

My solution was to obtain a Mobile Environmental Control Unit. So I guess that I'm really living in the solution instead of the problem.

If the ultimate source of the mold cannot be resolved, a susceptible person who has been primed is probably wasting their money, time, and precious remaining health trying to block these toxins.

Even if the source can be resolved, if the environment has built up an accumulation of adsorbed toxins, it will still keep a primed person ill for years before the toxins denature.
Making that decision to leave has to take so many factors into account that what must be done arises from your own individual circumstances.

A person less reactive will consider it unthinkable to crawl outside in the snow and pitch a tent. A person at a greater level of desperation wouldn’t think of doing anything less.

The only way I see to help enable people to find out just how concerted their efforts need to be is to let them experience a taste of what life would be like if there were no mold.

From then on, it’s a matter of their own efforts at balancing how bad the circumstances are against what can possibly be done with the resources they have.

It's horrible being trapped into a situation where you know that what you must do is going to financially destroy you.

But what is the alternative? If you are steadily going downhill, the further you go that direction, the harder it is to climb back up.

Been there and done it, and from my perspective, it's better to walk out sooner than crawl out later.

If your environment is beyond something that you can handle, evacuation of the premises and abandonment of possessions puts you far ahead of what happens by remaining there.

You won't hear this from the hopeful people who have not yet been driven to such extremes but are still headed there.

All of us who were pushed out in the cold were once in a stage where we did our very best to ignore the fact that we were still getting worse, despite our best efforts and throwing all our money at this problem.

-Erik (2006)

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Anyone who has been forced to evacuate in order to save their life would realize that financial considerations have nothing to do with this. The choice has been taken away.

It's get out or die.

Any severe reactor who has reached this point can look back at others who are steadily progressing toward a very bad place, and tell them that what they think is a lesser evil and being more cost effective is false economy.
They are squandering their health and what remains of their resources when they would be much better off if they did what needed to be done sooner rather than later.

If your situation is getting steadily worse, and if all your interventions have not stopped this downward progression, you can extrapolate where you will wind up.

It is better to get out no matter what your current lack of resources may be, because later you will only have less to work with.

-Erik (2009)

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There's just no way of telling which way different people will decide to go when confronted with this situation. Some people just "do what comes naturally" and bail... while others fight to the death.

I've watched people die in bad places after being told that their only chance is to get out. But they chose not to.

And on the other hand, when I was out at the airport building my MECU, I met a lady pilot (with a neat little aerobatic plane) who was wondering what I was doing with my strange RV contraption. When I told her, she had a tale of her own to tell.

She had her dream house in a beautiful location. Wanted to stay there the rest of her life.

But she just didn't feel good there. Naturally, doctors hadn't a clue, so she got all the usual psych diagnoses. She really liked the place where she lived, but it just seemed to be sucking the life out of her for no apparent reason.

She said, "I just got sick and tired of being sick and tired, so I moved."

-Erik (2008)

**A PLACE TO LIVE**

The reason for systematic self-testing is so you know what you are looking for if you make a move.

It's tough to talk a prospective landlord into letting you sleep in a place before you rent it, but that's what you have to do.
As a Moldie, it's important to know that you have to ask for this or you can't even take a chance on renting.

-Erik (2006)

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The #1 problem I see that most people have is that they try to perceptify a safe place, commit to a lease... and find out that it is not tolerable.

Don't commit to nuthin' until you have had some practice with mold avoidance.

-Erik (2008)

**GIVING ADVICE**

I'm not proposing that anybody do what I do.

-Erik (2004)

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I don't tell anyone to adopt this if they don't want to.

I don't espouse it unless they are in my shoes, suffering.

"In my shoes" was to do something radical or die.

Yes, if I see someone like that, I have no qualms about telling them to run for their lives.

For all others, it remains optional. Their choice.

Although I see many people who are suffering so much that it is a mystery to me why they refuse that choice, it is not my place to tell people what to do.

-Erik (2009)
Chapter 38

Personality Issues

AN ATTITUDE CHANGE

After a night in a bad building, I'd typically start out my day feeling like, "What's the use? I'm probably down to my last few days of life anyway."

But I knew that my attitude was going to change considerably when I'd get clear.

So I used to tell people, "Don't ask me anything right now, because I'll probably give you a completely different type of answer later, after I've had a chance to get outside."

And sure enough - an hour or two outside and I was a different person.

-Erik (2008)

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I made a point to never make any important decisions until I got clear, and the world opened up to me.
Possibilities existed where there seemed to be none left. I had strength, where before I was powerless.

It was like a miracle.

-Erik (2010)

**BLAMING OTHERS**

Most people I know living in moldy places have simultaneous reactions of anxiety, irritability and depression at times of mycotoxin release.

With no apparent reason for their discomfort, they blame their own increased irritability on the bad mood and strange behaviors of the person next to them - little realizing they are both doing the same thing.

A perfect recipe for mold-induced divorce syndrome.

The other thing is that higher mental functions diminish considerably during exposure.

People having neurotoxic reactions seem not only incapable of using logic, they lose the very recognition of the need to consider logical arguments as being more relevant in problem solving than act from purely emotional considerations.

-Erik (2005)

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A couple I know were having relationship problems. They felt anxious, irritable and had great difficulty sleeping.

When one was feeling like crap, so was the other. So they blamed each other for bringing negativity and stress into their lives.

I asked them to correlate their mood swings and sleeping problems to times of wind shift, because I could feel that the place was being plumed from a compost farm a quarter mile away.

They were amazed.
It was incredible when they finally correlated their "emotional problems" to the wind direction from the compost farm and realized it was something they were both going through together and not the other person’s fault.

-Erik (2008)

A TOXIC PERSON

When an unknowing mold responder encounters someone who is drenched with mold and goes into depression response, guess who gets the blame?

"Just being around you makes me feel depressed. You're a toxic person."

Well, kinda, but it might not really be a personality issue.

I remember this one guy that people would say, "He has a black cloud over him. He brings everybody down with his negative vibrations, just by walking in the room without even saying anything."

That guy wasn't like that at all. And when he stopped working in a bad place, his magic negative vibes on everybody just vanished.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 39

Others’ Responses

DISBELIEF

Nobody in my family believed me. No doctors. Only a very few very good friends.

Until Melinda Ballard’s story broke on the front page of USA Today, I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of people who failed to tell me I was wrong or exaggerating or just plain refused to listen - and I have seen more doctors than most people have.

I still carry that newspaper article around with me.

-Erik (2006)

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It's pretty wild when you find out that the "effect" of a single object is literally beyond belief.

You know it is, because you try to talk to people about it and nobody believes it.
I talked to a guy in France who had an antique bedroom set that had been in the family for generations.

"It is killing me but if I get rid of it, my family will kill me."

-Erik (2015)

**SIGNIFICANT OTHERS**

Sorry to hear about all the relationships that are collapsing.

Been there and done it. Really sucks.

Prior to the naming of CFS, Dr. Cheney half-jokingly told me that this illness should be called Divorce Disease, because it really puts relationships to the test.

Does your husband understand that the more clear you can get, the better chance of returning to a functional life in the shortest possible time?

But I know from my own experience that when family members choose not to believe, it's really not an evidence-based decision.

Have you done an exposure assessment "before and after" of comparative C4a values to show your husband how astronomically the innate immune system is activated by your house?

-Erik (2008)

*

I've seen non-responder women be no less brutal to their moldsick husbands.

Two of us Moldies were in a doctor’s office (at the doctor’s request) to try to explain the situation to a guy whose wife was completely unsupportive. She had no hesitation in saying we were delusional, that they had lived in that house for years and there was no way she was moving out for some crazy mold nonsense that she had never heard of before.
He tried moving into his son’s house for about a week but took all of his clothing and bedding with him. He didn’t feel much better, so he abandoned all concepts of trying to avoid mold. It was pretty clear that the pressure to do nothing was from his wife.

The doctor, who was in the throes of having to abandon his own house, was disappointed that he couldn't help his patient, who was a personal friend.

-Erik (2008)

**MOLD THEORY**

I get a kick out of the way people who aren't reactive call it a "Mold Theory."

What theory? You come into contact with mold and get sick and somehow it's a "theory"?

If you see flames in the fireplace, you've got a "theory" that it might be hot.

When you stand too close and burn your buns, is it still a "theory" to the person who hasn't been burned yet?

-Erik (2004)

**MISATTRIBUTION**

I can be reactive to mold spores that my cat carried into my house from somewhere else and then demonstrate that I had no allergic reaction to my cat later, but the doctors still rejected my insistence that it was mold and not the cat.

-Erik (2002)

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My cat perked up considerably after we got out of mold hell.

When the doctors insisted that the reactivity I was experiencing was due to my cat and told me to kill her, I cried and thought about it for a while.

When everyone was calling me a liar, my cat was my best friend. My cat suffered right there with me and there was no doubt that the mold was affecting her too.
I decided that there was no way in hell that I was going to betray my best friend the way doctors, "friends" and family let me down.

My cat and I are going to make it or go down together.

So far, we've done pretty well.

I feel guilty and weak that for a brief moment I even considered betraying my friend. It will never happen again.

-Erik (2004)

*

I know about a school that is full of "problem children" that throws off a plume that hits me half a mile away.

I was in town standing next to a child coughing in a pharmacy and heard the mother say that the doctors couldn't figure out the kid's strange cough and allergies. The kid was wearing a team shirt from that school.

I heard of one girl from that school who was acting out, achy, fatigue, couldn't get along with anyone, couldn't get up in the morning. It was weird because she had been a great student before going to this school.

So the parents blamed the lousy teacher, poor counselors and bad schoolmates.

They got her into another school and this girl shaped right up and returned to her former self, like a miracle.

The parents prided themselves on recognizing the problem with the bad teachers and made a point of telling everybody how rotten and poorly run that school system was.

Of course, the teachers were undoubtedly being affected as well. It's hard to be a great teacher when your brain is fried.

That whole area was known for peculiar levels of violence and domestic disputes, even though it was just another normal-appearing middle class neighborhood.

-Erik (2010)
NEIGHBORS

That's a darn shame about that poor gal who is having her "bubble" shed home taken away from her.

That's why I went out of my way to make my MECU both mobile and stealthy.

You don't get much sympathy for your intense efforts to try to stay functional with this illness.

I was thinking they should put the thing on a flatbed trailer, take it away for a few days, then bring it back but park it as a temporary trailer so it's not officially a shed.

I figured that would make it harder for the neighbors to fight them.

-Erik (2008)

WORKPLACE

We've all had to fight, argue, debate, assert, scream, yell, contradict and defy our doctors, "friends," family and pretty much all other humans to get validation for a problem that, when it comes right down to it, can be so easily demonstrated as to be clearly self-evident to anyone with a semi-rational mind.

I heard of a teacher in a temporary classroom structure (temporary meaning at least 20 years) in the Bay Area who claimed that something in the wall right next to her desk was making her violently ill.

The school authorities treated her like she was crazy. They never took any action except to make her appear like a crackpot and undermine her credibility in front of her students.

So one day she came to school armed with a hammer and right in front of her class turned around and broke through the wall.

Black mold spilled out.

She collapsed on the floor and couldn't move.

Her students evacuated the room and the school authorities left her lying there until the police arrived and detained her for being mentally unstable and damaging school property.

Obviously unfit to be a teacher, she was fired.
I got that story from one of her students, who recounted it to me after I told of my own bad experience with the medical profession.

She must have been a good teacher, though, because this lesson made one hell of an impression on her students.

-Erik (2009)
*

Just wait till you see what happens to the first person in a sick building who notices that something is wrong and tries to bring this to the attention of coworkers....who start to think about what this might do to their jobs.

The usual reaction is that not only the managers and building owners will make you their enemy. So will all the people who feel that your information threatens their jobs.

The people who don't believe in mold illness will just hate you for spreading hysteria. You would think that people's concern for their own health would prevent them from launching themselves at you.

This has not been what really happens.

-Erik (2008)
*

I identified a mold responder years ago who, in turn, tried to help a coworker who was complaining of the early signs that give it away.

The coworker not only didn't believe it but helped spread the notion around the office that my friend was crazy. The boss wound up demanding a physical exam from an allergist to confirm the reality of my friend’s claims.

When the allergist said there was no medical basis, she was fired.

This actually turned out to be good thing, because after getting out of the moldy place, she recovered.

The coworker that she was trying to help?

She’s diagnosed with fibromyalgia, depression and arthritis. She can barely work part time, and her husband is thinking about divorce.
Oh, and the doctors can’t find out what is wrong, of course.

-Erik (2009)

**LAWS**

The way this is progressing, there can be no laws or litigation that applies to a severe reactor.

We are completely beyond the range of anything normal.

-Erik (2015)
Chapter 40

Lifestyle Choices

DECISIONS

Probably the hardest part is deciding what to do.

Some people move to Mexico, find a good place, and do fine. Others try, don't find a good place, and wind up in a tent.

Houses which are out in the middle of nowhere-ville seem to be just fine for me. Special construction isn't necessary.

If you have the ability to be a snowbird, I guess you could just go south and look for a good place to roost, rather than fuss with all this MECU stuff.

I adopted the MECU concept so I wouldn't have to do that.
Probably, the best way to reclaim something that looks like a normal life is like "The Maritime House."

Normal materials, but in a good place.

And then when you want to visit folks in bad places, some kind of MECU that allows you to decontaminate and gives you a safe place to sleep.

-Erik (2008)

Out in Austin, Nevada, there is a peculiar house called "The Maritime House."

It was on the local news, years ago.

This gal found that she couldn't live on the coast and needed a dry climate to survive.

But she loved coastal ambience and missed it terribly.

So her husband built her a blue-and-white Cape Cod cottage out in the middle of the desert. It's surrounded with nets, sand, starfish, barnacles, anchors and all kinds of marine flotsam and jetsam.

That's where she stays, never going back to the coast.

The interesting thing is that the doctors had no idea why she couldn't live on the coast. Mold was never mentioned.

This was just something she had to do so that she wouldn't totally fall apart.

I thought the whole thing was just brilliant.

-Erik (2009)

**NO CURE**

This protocol has its downsides - to put it mildly.

This was an act of total desperation and this lifestyle would be considered devastating in and of itself to anyone who isn't fighting for their very lives.

-Erik (2005)
* 

I took a wild leap at the chance that these mold toxins were what was keeping me chronically ill, and I'm glad I did. I've had quite a few adventures that were only made possible by mold avoidance.

I never claimed to be "cured."

I said that by using a strategy of extreme avoidance, I can spend my time climbing mountains and acting semi-normal instead of feeling like mold susceptible people do when they are having a reaction to toxic mold.

Not a cure, but hiking the Evolution Wilderness is sure a lot more fun than lying in bed hoping to die.

-Erik (2006)

*  

I'm always camping. I haven't been able to successfully live in a house since 1994.

People go ballistic on me and say, "That's no cure."

Well, sure, but it's a clue. And it beats the alternative.

-Erik (2007)

* 

When people first hear me talk about mold avoidance, their usual experience is with someone who is trying to sell them a miracle-cure therapy, and their response tends to be from that perspective.

"Erik, but what you are doing is not a cure."

No, it isn't. It's just what I had to do in order to have any kind of a life.

Naturally, if a miracle cure pops up, that would be great. But I'm not holding my breath, waiting.

-Erik (2008)
**HOUSENESS**

Would you be willing to live like a vagabond, if it gave you control over your symptoms?

-Erik (2006)

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I don't have a house.

I'm just living in a custom built RV that is made entirely of metal and plastic.

I used to feel sorry for myself and longed for "houseness."

Seeing as how things are going, now I feel totally sorry for homeowners. They are really in one heck of a jam.

-Erik (2008)

*

I'm beginning to wonder about real estate, in general, as an investment.

If things keep going the way they have been, it does no good to have a mold free house in a mold region.

Every building is a bad building.

-Erik (2008)

**RV LIFE**

> I would live like Erik if I didn't have a baby and husband.

Living in an RV park in a custom built mold-resistant RV?

Traveling to the woods nearly every weekend?

Doesn't really sound so bad, does it? At least, not compared to feeling lousy all the time in conventional houses.

Many guys have told me that they envy my lifestyle.
I don't see how a baby would mind. There are other people living like I do who have children.

Kids seem to think it's pretty cool.

My cat certainly seems to like it. She is out prowling, even as I write this.

-Erik (2009)

*

It's a beautiful day here in Reno. There are mold plumes just to the south, and a few stray sourcepoints up north, but I found a good place to plant myself, in between them.

If I'm careful about bringing in contamination, I can keep this good spot pretty good. So far anyway.

Feels great here. Terrific sunny day. The awning is out, blankets hanging in the sun, been cutting firewood, had a barbecue. For all intents and purposes, I am not living much differently than the other RV'ers I'm next to.

And people would rather live like a "normal person" and put up with a moldy house rather than do this?

-Erik (2009)

*

My life is not discernibly different from the other RV full-timers around here. They have small children and it doesn't seem to bother them at all. In fact, they even appear to think this lifestyle is fun.

The difference is that my RV is custom built and that I decontaminate at the door. But they can't see that.

Erik (2011)

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

People asked me if I wasn't a bit concerned about being off in the woods with nobody but my kitty to protect me.
Huh? You mean...me, kitty and my buddies..."Smith and Wesson"?

-Erik (2008)

*

I guess the word "camping" conjures up images of miserable people huddled in a tent, but my family extends this RV's too. And they have everything a house does.

The camping is meant to get a sense of "pristine-ness" to let you know what it feels like. After that, you can do anything you want to achieve it.

Some people who can afford it are building very nice mold-free mansions in pristine places. Most of us can't do that.

-Erik (2008)

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With all the systems in place, in a functional MECU, the difficulty seems like nothing more than a camping trip with an extra bit of washing.

-Erik (2009)

*

I've had people get angry at me and say, "But this isn't fair. You always loved camping and being outdoors, so this isn't even a big change in your lifestyle."

OK, I admit it.

I cheated.

-Erik (2009)

**HITTING THE LIMIT**

They are tearing down the Park Lane Mall in Reno, about a half mile west of where I am sitting.

This place knocked me flat for years, and the demolition is unleashing clouds of spores.

Yesterday, I hit my limit and had to bail out of here.
Thankfully, I have my safe zone located elsewhere and was able to get free and decontaminate before the immune upregulation went insanely hurtful.

If I stay too long in a place that hits me, as this zone does while this disturbance of mold colonies is taking place....well, I'd be screwed!

I have to get out of such zones no matter what it takes and get the spores off me.

I must do this in a timely fashion or face the consequences.

What I have seen since the beginning of CFS is that others share this same susceptibility, but that they aren't taking sufficient measures to control it.

That is the difference between me being laid out bedridden or dead - and being on top of Mt. Whitney.

-Erik (2007)

* 

Yeah...I got slammed yesterday far worse than I like to let on. I'm still not quite back to normal.

You know how we went to the store where I said that I'm usually just a bit upregulated after being at work?

After that slam, I could hardly stand up in there.

Not only did I have to decontaminate in Reno, but then I had to run up to Donner Pass to get clear.

And then, just standing next to the camper, my heart was pounding like crazy.

I had been a bit suspicious about the weather. Wind was coming from the east, which means that a large low pressure system is going through. Bad sign. So I kept my HEPA system on the whole time I was in Reno.

Thank God! If I hadn't, I'd have been out in a tent!

As it was, just the contamination coming in from the exterior meant I had to keep changing blankets.

But, I can't complain.

I can remember what it was like having no options...no way to get clear.
Thanks to having the MECU, I spent the day hiking up on the Pacific Crest trail instead of suffering in shrieking agony and seriously considering calling Dr. Kevorkian.

I'm thinking that what I'm doing here is too much for me and that I better start seriously considering moseying on down the trail. Hate to! I love it here, but there's just too many plumes.

-Erik (2008)

FUN STUFF

My lifestyle choice was to combine every chance to get clear with having as much fun as possible.

To everyone else, it appeared that I just chose to be outdoors all the time, to the detriment of pursuing career and ignoring other vital aspects of a normal life.

The focus I placed on camping, hiking, kayaking and doing all kinds of other fun stuff was the result of discovering that if I didn't, I soon would be unable to stand up, would be wracked with pain, and would be losing ground in terms of my susceptibility to mold.

-Erik (2006)

*  

This is an example of turning what people consider the "weakness" into a strength.

After I gave up trying to lead a normal life and started using my sensitivity as a guide to action, I finally took significant control over my illness - and was able to go out and have adventures rather than being flat on my back and totally miserable.

-Erik (2008)

*  

Hiking is good.

Being out in a pristine environment, sweating out the toxins naturally, all while enjoying the scenery and fresh air.

Yeah, that's my therapy.

-Erik (2008)
SOCIALIZING

Contrary to what people think, this lifestyle has allowed me to interact with friends and family in an active, healthy way that is pretty much impossible for someone who is laid out in a darkened room in shrieking agony with blinding headaches and photophobia.

Unfortunately, dipping into mold zones is still a real chore.

At least I can do it with much less pain than I used to.

-Erik (2008)

*

I remember having friends enter my safe zone and having to assess them before allowing entry.

"No, no. Don't sit there. You have to sit in THIS chair....over here on the towel, so I can toss the towel outside after you're gone."

Wow, the crap that we've survived!

-Erik (2009)

“THE DESERT”

I never would have said "The Desert" if I had known that people were going to take it as if I meant that nothing less than a desolate Godforsaken drought-stricken snake-infested patch of barren sand was good enough.

I probably never should have used the term.

Really, I just intended it as a metaphor for getting out to the wilderness.

-Erik (2008)
Chapter 41

Life History

YOUTH (1950’s-1970’s)

I come from a farming family which used to supply hay for the US cavalry.

My granduncle, Gottleb, eschewed the newfangled methods of baling hay, as he said it this technique results in moldy hay and sickly horses.

He resisted using new farming methods, right up until World War II, much to the dismay of his brothers. But being the oldest, he was in charge and was obstinate.

From economic necessity, Gottleb went to the new methods for the cavalry. But he used the old rakes and haystacks for his own horses, which everyone said were noticeably healthier for it.

My grandmother complained bitterly about living right next to the hay barn and forced my grandfather to build her a new house.
I thought this was a bit odd, since the new house was scarcely a mile away. What was the point of going to so much trouble, yet moving such a short distance away?

I had my father take me to both places a couple of years ago, and then I got a clue.

The new one was out in the fields, and the area felt pretty good to me.

The old one was surrounded by the sensation I recognize as being from the bad mold.

I told my dad, "No wonder. Now it makes sense why she did that."

-Erik (2009)

* 

I grew up in an old hotel that had green wallpaper that was old enough to be a trimethylarsine Gosio’s gas producer.

The hotel, which was an old stagecoach stop on Sonora Pass, had this gorgeous green wallpaper whose color was absolutely mesmerizing.

Everyone commented that they had never seen such amazing color.

When I read the description of the vivid hues of the "Killer Wallpaper," I was absolutely floored.

That is exactly how the arsenic pigments are described, but the place burnt down and I cannot have it tested.

-Erik (2009)

* 

This building made me sick: Truckee High School.

I stood in the hallway directly in front of the conference room and argued with a sick teacher about it.

She didn't believe me when I said how much better I felt by getting outside as much as possible.

-Erik (2010)

*
It was almost impossible for mold to grow anywhere at Tahoe when I was growing up. Now it is everywhere.

This change has happened so quickly that it appears what might have been a normal house yesterday will be a mold prone spore factory tomorrow.

- Erik (2015)

**ARMY (Late 1970’s)**

I got my first killer mold slam in an interesting place.

It was in Hitler's Bunker in Giessen, Germany.

In 1975 I was in the Army, stationed in the bunker that Hitler ordered built for his command and control structure for Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain.

This was a reinforced bunker with five levels below ground that were flooded at the end of World War Two. We used the buildings above the bunker.

The Germans called it Verdun Kaserne, but it was renamed Rivers Barracks in honor of Sgt. Rubin Rivers. We called it the Zoo.

I have pictures of myself trying to prepare a lance tactical battlefield nuclear missile for launch with toilet paper plugging up my inexplicable constant bloody nose.

At the time I could never understand the fatigue and inability to tolerate cold that was progressively getting worse.

Now I know.

I also know that this isn't just an indoor air problem.

I was doing my daily two-mile run around the Kaserne when I would run into a spore plume and get knocked flat. I would suddenly become unable to continue with a run that normally wouldn't even raise a sweat. I didn't know what it was that stopped me in my tracks then.

Now I know.

- Erik (2002)

*
In 1976 we had some of the worst rain in Germany for over a hundred years, and the basement armory flooded.

I was part of a group detailed to go down weeks after and clean out the cardboard boxes that were covered in black mold.

There was nobody down in the armory to tell us where to get rid of this shit, and I asked "Where's the supply sergeant? Shouldn't he be down here helping us?"

"Oh, he got really sick with a brain tumor or something. They think he’s going to die. They med-evac'd him back to the States."

Within an hour or so, I could barely stand up. The others finally told me to get lost, since I was just about useless and just getting in the way. Looked like I was ready to collapse.

I never recovered from that.

I told the captain (the same one with the peanut allergy) that something down below the bunker was killing me.

I speculated that perhaps some chemical agent or pesticide left behind by the Nazis was leaching out of some hidden storage area and feeding the weird mold that was growing all over the place.

He actually listened to me. He was worried. Others were sick too, but nobody was able to figure out what was going on.

People said from that point on, I looked like I had the Vietnam "Thousand Yard Stare" and was totally burned out.

-Erik (2009)

*

The first concept I proposed to my CO was that deteriorating drums of pesticides or delousing powder were feeding the black mold in sealed subterranean storage areas beneath the bunker and releasing toxic plumes from vents that were scattered around periphery of the bunker complex.

(The bunker had several levels that were flooded by the Nazis when they abandoned the Kaserne.)

He actually took me seriously.

There were too many sick soldiers in my unit to be a coincidence. One guy down the hall died of a brain tumor.
The chem/bio unit checked the premises but found nothing.

My CO said that all we could do is wait to see if more people become ill before deciding on further action.

More soldiers did become ill, but the numbers were too few and the illness was too "random" to get any further investigation.

The qualities of this agent appeared to be neurologically disabling, and after finding that emissions could act independently of spores, I began referring to it as a kind of "nerve gas."

-Erik (2009)

*

I was fortunate enough to have had a weird experience with my commanding officer which completely reshaped my view of allergies and gave me a powerful advantage.

My captain was a peanut responder who dropped in his tracks while yelling in my face during disciplinary action - just by inhaling a few peanut molecules from a sandwich I had just eaten.

It was incredible. Peanuts were harmless to me, yet the slightest exposure could drop him in his tracks.

When I applied this hyperreactive conceptual model to my own circumstances, it fit much better than the classical toxicology concepts which doctors were trying to impress upon the situation.

And when I acted in accordance with that extreme reactor model, I had demonstrably better results than the people around me, who had all the signs of dealing with a similar problem.

That incident took place in Hitler’s Bunker, as we jokingly called it.

Perhaps that was why my CO had such a severe reaction.

-Erik (2008)

*

I think I may have the European strain of Lyme, because of a peculiar incident that happened to me in Giessen, Germany.
I was in the Army out on field maneuvers and got the strangest "flu" I ever felt. Raging sinus infections, neuro symptoms - you know, "the works."

It was really bad, but it wasn't CFS.

But when I went on sick call, they wouldn't let me go to the dispensary (hospital) because I had no temperature to go along with the "flu."

They accused me of malingering and said, "You don't have any elevated temperature at all! In fact, your temperature is below normal by a few degrees."

I asked, "Doesn't a low temperature mean that something is wrong?"

"No, we only send people in for a checkup if their temperature is high."

So I spent the next week out in the back of a leaky five-ton truck in the pouring "Giessen" rain, so sick I couldn't even get up to eat. The only action the military took was to occasionally yell at me how I was going to be disciplined when we got back to garrison.

After a few days, my own sergeant could tell I wasn't faking and at least checked to see if I was still alive.

I consider this incident to be the beginning of my total descent into hell, which didn't culminate in the CFS illness until the strange flu-like Truckee Crud swept through Incline Village in 1985.

-Erik (2004)

*

The ironic thing is that I got out of the Army because I hated the constant biowarfare drills.

Being woken up multiple times in the middle of the night to don my M17A1 gas mask when the chemical alarms went off.

Having to take immediate evasive action and decontaminate.

Over and over and over.

Hated it. Hated it. Hated it.

Who'd have thought it would have turned out to be the best thing that could have happened?
When I finally figured out that low-level, almost “insignificant” seeming exposures were still having a very bad effect, my training just kicked in.

I had experienced cross contamination with CS, and so when I had lingering effects from moldy buildings on possessions and clothing, I could see that it was the same situation.

The sensation was not the same, but the action of cross contamination is strikingly similar.

-Erik (2009)

BAY AREA (Early 1980’s)

When I got back to the U.S. and unpacked my stereo and belongings, I was laid out. They knocked me flat.

I was fresh out of the military as a veteran Nijmegen marcher in the best shape of my life. Suddenly I couldn't keep up with my brother on a hiking trip, and he'd never backpacked or been a runner at all!

It was just my stuff.

It was more than enough to do a number on me.

-Erik (2005)

*

I got slammed while on a construction project in Berkeley in 1980. It was on the UCB campus, right next door to the School of Law.

While I was feeling so lousy, a guy that I was going to meet for lunch to hear his WW2 stories walked in the front door, downstairs, apparently very chipper and feeling just fine.

Not a sign of what was about to happen.

Poured himself a cup of coffee, sat down, had a massive heart attack and died on the spot.

Since I felt bad and my heart was pounding after walking in the door, I didn’t think it was a coincidence, but nobody believed me.
After all, "Mold is just an allergy, and even if his heart attack was triggered by a mold allergy, that just shows that it was his time to go because allergies don't kill anyone."

Two other people on our crew became ill and started going to doctors.

One was a plumber, who suddenly acquired a reactivity to poison oak that he hadn’t had before. The other was an electrician who started feeling tired all the time and became so reactive to wheat that his doctor told him that he had to give up all sources of wheat... including beer, which sounded to me like a fate worse than death.

I just couldn't seem to shake that slam.

I started going to doctors. They had never heard of anything like this.

Seemed like every time I went into a bad building after that, not only would I get knocked for a loop, it was a guaranteed nosebleed.

-Erik (2009)

*

I taught hang gliding for years out at Dillon Beach.

On crappy days when we’d get rained out, we would retreat to a bar in Petaluma for a hot brandy before heading back south.

The place was a slammer and I soon learned to stay away.

Nobody understood why I just refused to go in and be sociable.

Why I took a sudden dislike to the place.

This is the lifestyle I've been forced to practice.

Moment to moment, paying attention and never ignoring those particular places that have taught me through years of experience that the long term effects of these "So what?" exposures have effects on me that go far beyond what anyone believes can be possible.

-Erik (2006)

*

Nothing stood out in the San Francisco Bay Area or Incline Village.
Except there were these weird things.

Certain places where simply going through would leave you drained and beat for hours afterward.

They didn't seem like much at first, in the 1980's.

But as time went along, I encountered them more frequently.

-Erik (2015)

**EPIDEMIC (Mid-1980’s)**

My "sudden onset" actually started when I inhaled a blast of mold, so I knew for sure that mold was a significant factor.

It was August 1984. I can’t remember the exact date, but I was out in some sand dunes on the coast and suddenly the whole world turned sideways.

This was such a strange sight to see that I didn't even realize that it wasn't the world turning sideways until the side of my head hit the ground.

I went, "Whoa! That's never happened before."

That was the first utterly neurological sign that something was wrong. I just suddenly totally lost all perception of balance.

I did not have any head injury at all. This was soft sand.

I had plenty of mold slams before that, but this was like nothing I had ever felt.

That’s when I went to see Dr. Cheney.

I didn't get the full sore throat and all other CFS symptoms until a year later.

-Erik (2010)

* 

In 1984, I was having health problems, and didn't have to go very far to find a doctor in this quiet little town at Lake Tahoe. I happened to live right next to one.

I went a few hundred feet to Dr. Cheney’s office. He did a bunch of tests, but said he had never seen anyone like me and had no idea what was wrong.
I had wild spins at night as if I were on the worst drunk of my life. Killer sore throat that looked like I had gargled with battery acid. I was bleeding from damn near every orifice. Rashes, veins looked all weird, heart palpitations. The list goes on.

I found mold in the north wall of the house, and there was another bit under the kitchen sink. If I went outside, then I could just about stand up - but if I tried to wash or do dishes at that sink, my eyes would go dim and I would collapse. I would literally have to hold my breath at that sink or suffer the consequences.

It just so happened that I had a camper, which I used when I was teaching hang gliding at Dillon beach. I got sick and tired of feeling like crap in that moldy house, so I'd go out and sit in the camper. For hours at a time.

The camper was just a basic shell and didn't have a heater. Somehow sitting out there gave me a slight reserve of function that I could use for a short time. I used that energy to find and install a heater so I could spend even more time in the camper.

It really helped, when nothing else did. That was about the only thing that gave me any significant relief from this Living Hell of a weird illness.

-Erik (2006)

*  

I was living at the upper end of Village Blvd. in Incline Village during the epidemic.

I found that when I got clear enough to start to feel better and tried to exercise, whenever I'd go down into Incline I would literally fall apart, barely make it home and crash for days. Yet if I went up towards Mt. Rose, for some very strange reason, I somehow failed to fall apart in the customary manner.

You can bet your ass which direction I went! So I was getting clear for a while each day - and at the same time increasing altitude to cause EPO release.

The place where I first consistently perceived that "Here's a spot I cannot pass without suffering like crazy" was right on a corner - the very corner that the "marathon runner who can't walk to the corner" mentioned in Osler's Web used to live.

So I know which specific corner it was that the marathon runner couldn't walk to - and why.

I also know that she moved away and started to mysteriously recover, which, of course, is always dismissed as a fluke no matter how many times people lucky enough to lower their exposure make the correlation to a location change.

The converse is also true. You can move to a worse place and slowly "lose it" again.
That’s how I wound up relapsing.

-Erik (2006)

* 

By the fall of 1986, I realized that staying inside was slowly tearing me to pieces and I had to get outside as much as possible.

I had an old camper, and I would just go out and sit in it and look at the back of Dr. Cheney’s office, recover a bit, and then try to survive the night inside.

Over the years, I just gradually kept pushing in the same direction, better and more avoidance, more time outside, and the more I controlled mold exposure, the better I got, and the more amazed I was that no one wanted to hear about this weirdness.

-Erik (2006)

* 

During the 1985 Tahoe Mystery Malady outbreak, I found that certain areas were so bad that just the amount I brought home on my clothing were enough to keep me sick.

I told doctors that no testing could possibly address my situation.

In all the years since our outbreak led to the creation of “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome,” my prediction to Dr. Cheney - "There will be millions of people like me" - has only grown more horrifyingly accurate.

It wasn’t until I abandoned the idea that this could be tested for, and acted on perceptions alone, that I could take control of it.

-Erik (2015)

* 

There was a clue in the Truckee teacher cluster.

The teachers wanted to open the windows, but they were screwed shut to save heating costs.

-Erik (2015)

*
Sierra Nevada College.

A chemical tanker with an inexperienced driver dumped its load.

I did not know it was toluene.

When it happened, we just knew it was "cleaning fluid."

It all ran into the creek and down Village Blvd., right down to the lake.

Below where the spill happened and was in the storm drains, I got sicker.

Above, I got better.

Sandy's house was below the spill. Mine was just above.

This was July of 1985, so this was as the flu-like illness had almost run its course and the outbreak was fading away.

One would think, "Okay, so it isn't connected."

But it sure laid a whup job on me.

-Erik (2015)

* 

During the outbreak, I took others to the intersection and told them about it.

We sniffed the air, but it comes and goes.

It wasn't particularly bad at the moment I had a group there.

One of them pointed down that street and said, "That is Sandy's house."

There never was any odor. Just a burning sensation.

I thought it was pretty amazing that I could make it right to that corner before almost passing out.

In Osler’s Web, Sandy Schmidt tried repeatedly to exercise but got smacked down.

I think the problem was is that she tried to go through that area, and just like me, it knocked her flat.
Because the moment she moved away, she started to recover.

-Erik (2015)

* 

All the CFS’ers I’ve taken on "The Mold Tour" have had an adverse reaction to the places where clusters of "mystery illness" occurred.

-Erik (2015)

**MOLDY LOG (1985)**

>When you say that the log was near Cheney's office, do you mean the Incline Village one? When was that?

It was within days after that spill.

The intersection at 1:22 is where the creek comes down from Sierra Nevada College.

Sandy’s house was on the last street to the right before the intersection. I was living where the white van is parked.

-Erik (2015)

* 

I'll never forget that log.

This was a fallen tree that had been down for several years.

My brother and I were getting wood up the dirt road directly above Dr. Cheney's office.

The whole bottom was covered with a pale green mold with white tips.

I saw some pictures of P. crustosum. The mold looked identical to that.

I didn't see the mold or the spore cloud until I rolled it up on another log in my arms.

I got a face full of it before I saw and could stop breathing.

I made it two steps before I hit the ground.

-Erik (2015)
PARTIAL RECOVERY (Late 1980’s – Early 1990’s)

I eventually recovered enough to start driving again, and it was a tradition for us Bay Area hang glider pilots to congregate and celebrate Thanksgiving at Big Sur every year.

I really wanted to go along even though there was no way I could even think about flying and felt so ill that I wasn’t sure if I could make it. But I had been sick so long that if I dropped dead, it would be a relief - so I went.

Much to my amazement, I had more energy and less pain while I was out camping than I had experienced in two years. It was incredible!

So I concentrated upon learning the specifics of this effect.

-Erik (2005)

*

I am not mentioned in Osler’s Web. By the time Hillary Johnson came around in the early 1990s, I was busy hiking up Mt. Rose and building an experimental aircraft to replace the hang gliding that I was still too ill to do.... and trying to figure out how to get people to look into the weird mold connection.

The reason I "lost it" in 1997 was because I bought a house in a mold zone for the specific purpose of building my second aircraft.

I thought that my system was tough enough to handle it, but I got beaten worse than a redheaded stepchild.

-Erik (2008)

RELAPSE (Mid-1990’s)

After I started paying more attention to the mold in 1985, I kind of stayed the same, moving from house to house. Nothing really changed for years.

Then I moved into a really bad house in 1994 and relapsed down to 1985 levels.

I was in a bad place prior to buying "the bad place" in 1994. At the time, I just wanted to move and didn’t know how to perceptify a place. I could feel that it was bad after I moved in, but it had been bad where I had come from so I felt like I was caught in my own personal problems more than attributing it to the environment.
So I kept going on with supplements and all the rest until September 1997, when I was literally on the floor, right back to crawling to the bathroom.

My symptoms were vastly different when I relapsed than they were in the mid-1980s. But then nothing about the illness had ever stayed the same for more than a few months. It was as if the disease was determined to hit every major organ system, and just kept jumping around until it hit all of them.

In 1994, I had an episode where I was just lying on the floor, unable to move. It was like my brain couldn’t move my muscles and nothing made sense.

I remember lying there, realizing that if anyone found me, I would be taken to a hospital and pumped full of drugs and not one person would believe me about the mold.

I would probably wind up unable to move, with tubes down my throat and no one would believe me. I managed to crawl out to my camper, where I felt somewhat better.

-Erik (2008)

The vertigo was coming back.

I was reacting to all types of chemicals. I couldn't stand just about everything. Dr. Peterson said I was a universal reactor. I remember having problems with trees, diesel, new cars, paint, carpet, outgassing plastics, perfume, stores, EMF’s.

I also was reacting to all kinds of foods. I had to give up drinking wine, eating cheese, bread, nuts. It seemed like everything was making me sick. I remember thinking, “What is left that I can still eat, mung beans?”

It was overwhelming.

It seemed like everything was out to kill me and closing in on me

Which way to go? What to do next? No therapy I ever tried had really made much difference before.

-Erik (2006)

Testing and medical bills broke me.

When I was at my worst, I told my parents that if I had a million dollars, it would do me no good with this illness.
I'd just give every penny to doctors.

I'd already seen that they haven't been able to help others with my illness, so it felt pretty useless. No way out.

-Erik (2008)

*

I was approved for the Ampligen study but did not qualify for the Hemispherx funded portion.

I could have had Ampligen under the cost recovery program, but I couldn't afford it.

Insurance companies had cut me off long ago, and I had none. Imagine trying to get insurance in my circumstances.

Dr. Peterson wanted to include me in the funded study because I was a member of the original cohort, but the cut-off was that I was still ambulatory. I was capable of walking, while the funded study for strictly for bedridden patients.

And the irony is that what made me capable of walking was that I was already doing a level of mold avoidance that helped me considerably.

I had nothing left to try except pursuance of this weird effect that mold seemed to have on me. So that's what I pursued.

I told Dr. Peterson that if I couldn't have Ampligen, I wanted to improve my efforts at something that was already paying off.

I asked if he would assist me in studying the characteristics of mold and devising a strategy of extreme avoidance. He said that mold was just an irritant and that he didn't think it would work.

I did see some people improve on Ampligen, but for me it might as well have been on the moon.

So it is ironic that many Ampligen success stories have relapsed and I am out mountain climbing.

I would say that I am the luckiest CFS'er in the world for not being able to afford Ampligen. Otherwise I surely would have gone for it and probably not done extreme avoidance.

-Erik (2008)
EARLY AVOIDANCE (Late 1990’s)

My "sudden onset" actually started when I inhaled a blast of mold, so I knew for sure that mold was a significant factor.

I had become so reactive to chemicals that I could pick out differences in my response, and one exposure that really stood out was to a particular mold. I took a sample of that mold out to the desert and trained myself to recognize subtle signs of exposure and treat those as if I had been in the presence of nerve gas.

By consistently practicing the procedures I was taught in the military for biological warfare nerve agent exposure, I started to improve.

The surprise was that with my heightened awareness of that specific mold, I found that other CFS’ers were responding to slight exposures in a similar way. Absolutely none of them were aware that this strange emanation of wafting brain fog was actually spore plumes of toxigenic particulates that create a lasting response - which makes it difficult to identify for what it is.

-Erik (2006)

* 

When I started thinking about how my health gradually shifted in places and according to seasons, it made me wonder how much further I might be able to control the problem if I learned to sense subclinical exposures to this substance, which was concentrated in certain places, and treat lesser exposures as though they were having a long term effect - in the same theoretical way as peanut anaphylaxis might wear someone down.

I went all-out concentrating on doing my own testing to determine just how much how mycotoxins were affecting me.

It wasn't until I performed my own simple tests and acted in accordance with the results that I finally managed to crawl out of what appeared to be an impossibly deep hole.

-Erik (2006)

* 

It turned out to be incredibly slight amounts of a specific mold: Stachybotrys.

I was so reactive to the stuff that to me, it was just like the unbelievably small amounts of peanut product or residue upon someone with severe peanut allergy.

Even the slightest cross contamination upon various possessions would set up the inflammatory response that was wearing me down. So I used my Army training in
biological warfare to devise an avoidance strategy very similar to battlefield Nerve Agent protocols.

I recovered beyond anything I dared hope for and have been out leading an active lifestyle ever since.

-Erik (2005)

*

I have no health insurance. I lost my business, house, insurance, hobbies and became homeless for a while.

Thankfully a friend gave me a place to sleep on the floor of his office.

-Erik (2004)

*

That's what it took for me! Thinking that I was going to die.

I sure wish I had had access to someone who could have told me what I was facing by not getting out in time - instead of being surrounded by people who told me that my inclination to bail out was crazy and unfounded.

I fought for everything I had and by trying to keep it, I lost even more. I lost my world when I became so reactive that standing next to a person with Stachy on their clothing is too much for me.

And it could have been avoided if someone like me had been around to say just how rotten it can be.

I was ready to hear it. But there was no one.

-Erik (2006)

*

I went nuts trying to remediate the house, which turned out not even to be the source of the problem. I wasted thousands, only to find out that the mold was coming from a sewer vent outside.

I didn’t really switch my thinking until I went camping, and then hung out for a while in front of the vent without even going in the house. Then it finally sunk in that nothing I did inside the house was ever going to make that area safe for me.
So I spent every penny I had before I crawled out on my hands and knees.

Back in those days, I was still being misled that not only was this only an allergy and that if one had any kind of problem with mold, it could be easily cleaned up.

I must have been completely out of it. Because I believed them and tried to clean up the house for the next four years, even though I wasn't sleeping in it.

I wish there had been someone who could have told me to just cut and run. Virtually everyone told me that even thinking that I needed to was a sign of insanity.

-Erik (2008)

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I pushed it too far, relying on doctors who told me that this was impossible and that mold could be cleaned up with a little bleach. At the time, there was no mention of toxic mold in the media, and virtually none of the dozens of doctors I contacted in Tahoe, Reno, Grass Valley and Sacramento had ever heard of such a thing.

I finally realized that I didn't have to go in my house to get sick. One time, there was three feet of fresh snow and it was snowing like crazy. I thought that any spores must surely be buried under snow and scrubbed out of the air by the intense snowfall. I was completely wrong and got horribly slammed.

Just passing through the neighborhood was enough. I didn't even have to stop at the house. That's when I realized that all my efforts were wasted.

I sold the house and used the money to buy an RV. Then I started running for my life from the moldy neighborhoods and scattered spore plumes that are everywhere, no matter whether it is Las Vegas, San Francisco or Tampa.

And that's what I'm still doing.

The downside is not having a home. The upside is that I don't have to worry about being trapped in a sick region, can escape horrible mold symptoms and can go hiking or mountain climbing whenever I choose.

-Erik (2006)

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At the beginning, my mold complaints were seemingly overruled by the fact that I had moved many times and it made no significant difference. It was just enough of a difference to let me know that there was a difference.
It didn't make sense.

Moving only gave me enough of an indication of a shift in symptoms to let me know that there was an "effect" which might be exploited.

The complications and logistics of cross contamination are absolutely formidable.

It wasn't until I adapted my training in biological warfare protocols from the Army that I really started to get a handle on direct intervention and control of my illness.

That is what it took. I was forced into a more concerted method because doing less simply wasn't helping me control my symptoms or recover.

It's not like I wanted to do this, but I had nothing else in the way of viable options.

-Erik (2008)

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My primary irritant was disputed by all doctors even though I could clearly feel that it was mold, so I adopted the expedient of hiring a mycologist to accompany me while I disturbed various mold colonies. When we found one that such disturbance released a cloud of spores and I collapsed on the floor, I said, "That's the one!"

It was Stachybotrys - and that was the first time I heard the name.

I knew that I had felt this Stachy hit in many locations and that testing by conventional means was expensive, time consuming and would not give me a real time indicator of exposure. So I took a sample of a Stachy-contaminated object to a pristine location and trained myself to recognize the most subtle sensations of exposure that I could perceive.

In this way, I don't require a major slam to recognize that I have been exposed, and I conduct avoidance before my immune system is upregulated to the point of being painfully disabled.

-Erik (2002)

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When I proposed this I had turned into a universal reactor and was being tortured by almost everything except when I was in the desert. But I remembered that my illness had started with mold reactivity and chose a leap of faith that this response had a specificity to it which was more important than the responses that followed later.
I got a sample of a Stachy contaminated item and wrapped it up in a HEPA filter. I laid it on the floor, covered it with six layers of blankets and tried to sleep on it.

I did this to familiarize myself with the mycotoxin response so that I could learn to recognize extremely subtle exposures.

Naturally I would get up after various periods of time absolutely fighting for my life. It is not a technique I can recommend, but since no doctors would help me and everybody told me that mold reactivity was impossible, I was forced to find my own way.

By learning to recognize mold hits before they turned into an immune devastating mold slams, I was able to consistently perceive, avoid and decontaminate from exposures before my immune response was forced into a damaging upregulated state.

I made no special effort to avoid anything except that feeling of exposure to mold. The response was a miracle beyond anything I dared hope for.

-Erik (2008)

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I identified a sample of the mold that was most bothersome and took a bit out to the desert. After getting myself as clear as possible, I did proximity testing to see at what distance this tiny amount would still have a discernible effect.

It was astounding. Just like the peanut allergy in my commanding officer. Infinitesimal amounts were still creating sensations which were only discernible by the fact that there was a shift in symptoms.

For example, if I was slightly depressed, it would get slightly worse. If I had difficulty sleeping, the problem would turn into full on insomnia. If I felt slightly anxious, it would turn into a sense of desperation.

What I felt wasn't "mold" per se, like an allergy. It was the shift in symptomology. And because I had taken the mold to a place free of other variables, I concluded that this was the factor responsible.

-Erik (2006)

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Instead just going to the woods, I tested out some used campers until I found one that I could tolerate. It was a bitch trying to talk dealers into letting me sleep in them, but I was lucky and found a few.
I got myself a camper. I started dropping my clothes at the door and taking a shower as soon as I got inside, to keep the nasties out.

It was more comfy than the tent in the woods that people were kind of misled into thinking I was doing.

-Erik (2009)

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The green binocular epiphany was the turning point when I finally started to get a handle on why this stuff could slam me from out of nowhere, for no apparent reason.

I had washed those binoculars, but they still slammed me.

I thought, "If these can do this to me after dunking them in a sink, the whole notion of mold testing and remediation is totally out the window. None of it applies to me."

So I acquired all new stuff and got rid of everything that I could feel the badness on.

I learned to "perceptify" stuff before it come in, to get rid of anything that slips through perceptification...and the most important thing of all, stay out of mold plumes.

I finally started to turn my reactivity around and decrease it.

-Erik (2009)

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Wouldn't it be great if someone with mold sensitivity identified a safe place and just said, "Go here?"

I did this in one shot, because I knew that when I went out to the desert and got clear, there was such a relative shift when I was re-exposed that it took a major part of guessing out of the equation.

I would go out and spend time in the boondocks and then go directly to the proposed place. A lot of "potentials" that I thought might have been okay were instantly revealed as not.

When I did find a place, I knew that dragging spores back in my hair would be too much.

I scrubbed an area of linoleum in a place that was already good and made that my safe zone.
I would not even sit in that area until I had taken a shower and washed my hair thoroughly.

I slept on an inflatable and washable backpacking sleeping pad, which I washed every day.

No pillow. Only a rolled up towel. Washed in a good place. I would change to a different towel every time I woke up.

I found a laundromat that felt good. I laid myself flat on the floor to perceive any accumulations of mold to see if it was safe enough to do laundry. There were so many that I couldn't tolerate, but I kept looking until I found one.

I washed a half dozen sleeping bags and as many towels. Wrapped them up in plastic bags and when I was ready to try to survive another night from hell, got them out and stacked them up. I rolled up the towels similarly in a stack. It took anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours for each new fresh surface to become contaminated.

When it did, I would throw it to one side and keep a fresh surface for a respite, as long as it would last.

If nothing else helped, I would prop myself up against a wall to keep my face as high up from the most intense area of spore accumulations where they occur on horizontal surfaces.

I spent every moment outdoors but even that wasn't enough. I had to learn to perceive mold plumes and avoid those areas.

There is a killer plume in Incline Village. It took me many times of passing through before I realized that just going through it momentarily would keep me ill for days.

Once I started decontaminating right away after passing through plumes and not waiting for symptoms to start up, I can hardly express how many CFS symptoms were simply washed right out of my life.

I can't believe any of this crap myself. How can I expect anyone else to?

But I did whatever it took to drag myself away from what I could so clearly perceive.

-Erik (2006)

*I*

I was way beyond the point of being able to tolerate anything that was contaminated, porous or not.
I couldn't even stand next to someone who had been in a moldy place. Nor downwind of them....for at least thirty feet.

Nobody knew the rules to this game, so I had to make up my own.

It was months before I was absolutely certain that I was doing the right thing. At about the four month mark, I seemed crawl up on the right side of the power curve and my improvement accelerated like crazy after that.

- Erik (2008)

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I was fortunate to have a part-time job, some friends, a camper, and a family that was supportive of whatever I was doing even though they didn't believe a word of it. Without so many resources, yes - it's really tough.

But if I could get out to a really decent pristine area for a couple of weeks, this would help give me more ability to do more.

It took several months of acting on faith before I was absolutely certain that I was getting better. The symptoms would swing wildly, but every month the low point was a bit less low and the high would get geometrically higher.

At first I wasn't sure about what was happening, because I could feel badness virtually everywhere. My sensitivity shot through the roof.

But what finally sank in was that there is huge difference between "sensitivity, the ability to perceive" and "reactivity, the profoundness of adverse effect."

Over time, I could feel it more, but it slammed me less. And the senses become so acute that instead of a curse, they turn out to be the best guide one could possibly ask for.

But only if you act in accordance with what you sense.

- Erik (2008)

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For a couple of months after my worst mold nightmare, I would make the area under my head "hot" when I tried to sleep.

Each place I lay would become intolerable after about fifteen minutes.

That's a lot of moving during the night.
Although I was covering the bed with plastic and using fresh blankets, every night I would run out of places on the bed to put my head.

Then I’d have to start using up floor space.

-Erik (2009)

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I despised the trancelike sensation that induces inertia.

The more intense it was, the more it inspired me to crawl outside.

Yes, it took all my willpower to drag myself out. Sometimes it seemed easier to just lapse into a somnolent state.

But I desperately wanted my life back, and this seemed like the only option I had.

And painful experience had shown that the longer I lingered in toxic torpor, the less the likelihood I had of ever getting that life.

-Erik (2008)

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The mold was such a paramount factor that I lost interest in taking any drugs, when they did not appear to be doing much in the way of eradicating this horrible reactivity.

There was another reason why I stopped doing all other therapies.

I wanted to make sure it was really avoidance that was doing it, so that people couldn’t point at something else I was doing as an excuse to talk themselves out of undertaking avoidance.

-Erik (2008)

**RECOVERY (2000 and Beyond)**

It all seems like a crazy dream now.

I am doing so much better that sometimes I think, "Did all that really happen?"
Then I look around at my “act of desperation” custom-built RV, my bedraggled possessions that remain, all the stuff for decontamination.... and I'm shocked back into reality.

Yes, it sure enough did.

-Erik (2009)
Glossary

**Above Tolerance.** An environment (particularly a home or work environment) that is host to a larger amount of mycotoxins than a particular individual can bear without becoming ill.

**ACTH.** Adrenocorticotropic hormone, which stimulates release of cortisol; serves as a masking device allowing individuals being affected by mold to function without observable symptoms.

**Adsorbed.** The process by which mycotoxins (or other gases or liquids) bond permanently to the surface of a solid item.

**Agitated Exhaustion.** A state experienced by mold sufferers as a result of their being unable to sleep deeply or restfully; may be caused by the presence of mold toxins.

**Air Test.** Environmental test looking for the presence of mold spores in the air; not helpful in gauging the presence of Stachybotrys or determining effects of an environment on severe reactors.
Ambiently Bad. A place with problematic air quality with regard to mold toxins.

Aspergillosis. A disease characterized by the colonization in the human body of the mold aspergillus; generally present only in individuals with compromised immune systems.

Aspergillus. A toxic mold that is easily airborne, contaminates food and sometimes colonizes the human body.

Avoidance. Staying away from areas or objects contaminated with toxic mold spores, spore fragments or mycotoxins.

Bad Building. A building with a problematic level of mold toxicity.

Badness. An area or object that has a negative effect on a mold responder.

Bad Zone. An area problematic for mold responders.

Balance the Books. Spend time in a low-mold area in order to mitigate the effects of previous mold exposures.

Benign Mold. Fungi that do not manufacture mycotoxins.

Beta Glucans. Pre-sensitizer compounds made by toxic molds.

Biotoxin. Toxin made by certain organisms, including certain types of mold, certain strains of Lyme bacteria, brown recluse spiders, certain types of algae, certain dinoflagellates and certain other bacteria.

Biowarfare Protocols. Methods used to combat the effects of biological, chemical and radiological weapons, using the principles of “detect, evacuate, avoid and decontaminate.”

Black Mold. Stachybotrys.

Blood-Brain Barrier (BBB). A boundary surrounding the central nervous system that prevents the penetration of certain substances such as commonly used chemicals; satratoxins can increase its permeability.

Blue-Sky Day. A clear sunny day with a low level of outdoor toxic mold.

Brain Fog. Decreased cognitive abilities experienced by mold illness sufferers.

Breaking the Response. Spending an extended amount of time in an environment with a low level of toxic mold, in order to stop a reaction.
C3a. A form of complement (anaphylatoxin) that tends to be elevated in patients with biotoxin illnesses.

C4a. A form of complement (anaphylatoxin) that tends to be elevated in patients with mold illness.

Carrying the Response. Having hair or clothing contaminated by previous exposures to toxic mold spores or spore fragments.

Chaetomium Globosum. A toxic mold that is particularly difficult to remediate.

Cholestyramine (CSM). A medication that was originally used to lower cholesterol and that is effective at removing mycotoxins and other biotoxins from the body.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). The disease identified in the Incline Village patient cohort in the mid-1980s, characterized by specific and persistent immune system, hormonal, neurological and other systemic abnormalities.

Ciguatera. A biotoxin illness obtained as a result of eating fish that are predators of dinoflagellates.

Clear. A system that is free enough of toxic mold for complement to decrease to normal levels, or an area that is low enough in toxic mold for this to occur in a particular individual.

Colony. A growth of mold.

Compensation. Spending time in areas low in toxic mold in order to be able to tolerate greater toxic mold exposure at other times.

Complement. Proteins in the blood that identify and remove molecules identified as foreign; these molecules can include mycotoxins, allergens, and pathogens.

Contamination. The exposure of an item to toxic mold spores or spore fragments, causing it to carry mycotoxins on it.

Crash. Extended abnormal physical exhaustion after a period of activity.

Cross Contamination. The process by which toxic mold spores or spore fragments dislodge themselves from one item and attach themselves to another item.

Cyclosporins. Immune suppressor compounds made by toxic molds.

Cytokine. Proteins that control inflammation; overproduction of pro-inflammatory cytokines and/or lack of anti-inflammatory cytokines are characteristic of mycotoxin illness.
**Damp Down.** The decrease in inflammation to a normal level as a result of decreases in toxic mold exposures.

**Decontaminate (Decon).** Wash one’s hair, take a shower and change clothes after being exposed to toxic mold spores or spore fragments.

**Delayed Response.** Negative reactions experienced hours or days after mycotoxin exposures occur.

**Denature.** The process by which items contaminated with mycotoxins become more tolerable to mold responders; occurs as a function of time or very high heat (500 degrees or higher); exposure to sunlight, high altitudes or alcohol also may contribute.

**Dent Test.** Observing the extent to which skin indentations as a result of pressure occur and persist as a way in which to measure the extent to which mycotoxins have created hypoperfusion or edema, and thus affected the system as a whole.

**Depression Response (also Anger/Anxiety/Panic/Suicide Response).** A negative change in mood resulting from exposure to mycotoxins.

“**Desert.”** A wilderness area with a low level of toxic mold.

**Detoxification.** The process by which toxic chemicals of any sort are expelled from the body.

**Die Down.** The process by which items contaminated by toxic mold lose their ability to negatively affect mold responders.

**Down-regulate.** A decrease in inflammation to a normal level, accomplished as a result of decreased exposure to toxic mold or other problematic substances.

**Dose Related.** An effect determined by the total amount of toxic mold to which a person has been exposed.

**Duration Related.** An effect determined by the length of time that a person has been exposed to toxic mold.

**Effect.** The changes that occur in the systems of sufferers of mold illness as a result of environmental exposures to toxic mold and/or related substances.

**EMF’s.** Electromagnetic fields such as those emitted by satellites, cellular phones, power lines, CD players and computers; possibly have the potential to cause molds to release more toxins or more potent toxins.

**EMF Sensitivity.** Being negatively affected by electromagnetic fields such as those emitted by satellites, cellular phones, power lines, CD players and computers.
ERMI. Environmental test looking at the presence of genetic material from molds.

Erythropoietin (Epo). An anti-cytokine protein that can improve VEGF problems in mold illness sufferers; may be increased by temporarily spending time at high altitudes.

Exposure. Coming into contact with toxic mold spores, spore fragments or poisons.

Extreme Avoidance. A technique using avoidance and decontamination techniques in order to limit exposure to even very small amounts of problematic mold toxins.

Extreme Responder (or Extreme Reactor). An individual who experiences negative symptoms as a result of exposure to very small amounts of problematic mold toxins.

Fusarium. A common food and outdoor mold that often can be toxic.

Getting Clear. Going to a low-mold area in order to reduce the symptoms of previous mycotoxin exposures.

Gluten Intolerance. Negative reactions to consuming protein found in wheat, barley, rye and oats; may dissipate subsequent to extended mold avoidance.

Godforsaken Desert (or Godforsaken Wilderness). Any area far from civilization and with a very low level of toxic mold.

Good Day/Bad Day Phenomenon. A common tendency of mold illness patients to feel better on some days than others, related in at least some cases to the total amount of toxic mold in the air.

HEPA Filter. An air filter that removes mold spores from the air, but that does not provide protection from small spore fragments or the mycotoxins manufactured by toxic mold.

High Spore Count Day. A day with a high level of outdoor toxic mold.

Hit. Contact with mycotoxin.

Hitting the Wall. Reaching a level of toxic mold exposure that causes the individual to suffer debilitating effects lasting for an extended length of time, and that cannot be quickly reversed by subsequent exposure to pristine areas.

HLA DR. A genetic test that is used by some doctors to try to assess an individual’s apparent ability to effectively eliminate from the body mycotoxins, Lyme toxins and other biotoxins.

Herxheimer. An exacerbation of symptoms in patients taking antibiotics or cholestyramine.
**House in the Desert.** A home in any secluded area with a very low outdoor mold level.

**Hyperreactivity.** Being affected by very small amounts of toxic mold to a much more dramatic extent than the average person.

**Hypoperfusion.** Decreased blood flow through an organ (including the skin), a problem common amongst mycotoxin poisoning sufferers.

**Hypothalamus.** The master gland of the endocrine system; produces MSH and other hormones.

**Intensification Reaction (or Intensification Response).** Phenomenon in which an individual’s reactivity to toxic mold increases dramatically after spending time in a place with a relatively low level of toxic mold.

**Intracranial Pressure.** Excess pressure in the brain and spinal cord; possibly may result as a result of inflammation from exposures to toxic mold.

**Ionophore Toxins.** A lipid-soluble molecule (including those made by toxic mold) that transports materials across cell membranes and distributes them evenly throughout the body.

**Leptin.** Cytokine made by fat cells that regulates body mass; high leptin and low MSH levels tend to be present in biotoxin patients and lead to obesity.

**Locations Effect.** The tendency of some ill individuals to feel better in some places than others; may be related to outdoor toxic mold levels.

**Low MSH Genotype.** HLA DR category that indicates an individual who may have a low amount of MSH, especially when suffering from biotoxin illness.

**Low Spore Count Day.** A day with a low level of outdoor toxic mold.

**Lyme Disease.** An acute or chronic illness caused by several species of bacteria belonging to the genus Borrelia and characterized by a wide variety of physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms (some similar to those attributable to mycotoxins).

**Lyme Susceptible Genotype.** HLA DR category that indicates an individual who is said to be unable to easily detoxify Lyme toxins from the system.

**Lymie.** Individual suffering from Lyme disease, especially chronic Lyme disease.

**Macrophage.** A type of white blood cell that collects cell debris and serves as a first-line defense against the infiltration of toxins and pathogens.
**Masking.** Compensations made by the system in order to continue to function despite toxic exposures; can prevent the recognition that an overload is occurring.

**MCS.** Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, a condition in which sufferers respond negatively to a wide variety of chemicals that do not affect most people; may abate with successful avoidance of toxic mold.

**Melatonin.** Hormone regulating restorative restful sleep.

**MELTDOWN Syndrome.** “Malingering Exaggerating Lying Troubled Over Worked Neurotic Syndrome.” Erik’s joking name for CFS, based on various causes for the disease postulated by uninformed professionals and laymen.

**Microbial Volatile Organic Compounds (MVOC’s).** Organic compounds that evaporate easily; these account for the mustiness of molds but not their most toxic characteristics.

**Mildew.** Superficial growth of fungi on organic surfaces.

**MMP9.** A pro-inflammatory cytokine that tends to be elevated in mycotoxic illness.

**Mobile Environmental Containment Unit (MECU).** Recreational vehicle or other vehicle that can be used for showering after mold contamination and for flexibility in being able to travel to areas that are low in toxic mold at a particular time.

**Mold.** Any of various fungi that often cause disintegration of organic matter; may be used as shorthand for “toxic mold” or “mycotoxins.”

**Mold Advocate.** Individual who attempts to make the dangers of toxic mold more widely known.

**Mold Allergy.** The body’s reaction to the misidentification of benign mold as problematic; characterized by symptoms such as sneezing, watery eyes, stuffy nose, itching or asthma.

**Mold Avoider.** An individual who makes an effort to obtain wellness by avoiding toxic mold.

**Mold Castle.** A home (especially an expensive home) characterized by a high level of toxic mold growth.

**Mold Facies.** A red rash on the face caused by exposure to toxic mold.

**Moldie.** An individual who suffers from negative effects of toxic mold, especially from very small amounts of toxic mold.
**Moldie Mobile.** An MECU.

**Mold Responder.** An individual who suffers from negative effects of toxic mold.

**Mold Sabbatical.** A finite period of time spent in a wilderness area very low in toxic mold, in order to gauge mold reactivity, increase mold sensitivity and/or promote healing.

**Mold Susceptible Genotype.** HLA DR category that indicates an individual who is said to be unable to easily detoxify mycotoxins from the system.

**Mold Swing.** A rapid change in mood due to a toxic mold exposure.

**Mold Toxicity.** Poisoning resulting from toxic mold exposures.

**Mold Unfriendly Environment.** A building or vehicle designed to prevent the growth of toxic mold.

**Mold Warrior.** Individual who is aware of negative responses to toxic mold and makes an attempt to avoid it, or individual who fights for the welfare of toxic mold sufferers.

**Mold Zone.** An area that constantly or frequently is hit with a large amount of airborne toxic mold.

**Mother Colony.** A growth of Stachybotrys or other toxic mold that feeds on a substantial amount of cellulose and a constant water source; often hidden from view inside walls or in other areas.

**MSH (Alpha Melanocyte Stimulating Hormone).** A hormone that regulates most aspects of innate immune response; often low in patients affected by toxic mold.

**Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).** A condition in which sufferers respond negatively to a wide variety of chemicals that do not affect most people; may abate with successful avoidance of toxic mold.

**Multiple Susceptible (or Multisusceptible) Genotype.** HLA DR category that indicates an individual who is said to be unable to easily detoxify a variety of biotoxins from the system.

**Multiply Antibiotic Resistant Coagulase Negative Staphlococci (MARCoNS).** A bacteria that is said to colonize the skin and nose of MSH-deficient patients, making their recovery from mold illness more difficult.

**Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME).** Another name for the disease identified in the Incline Village patient cohort in the mid-1980s, characterized by specific and persistent immune system, hormonal, neurological and other systemic abnormalities.
Mycotoxicosis. Disease caused by exposure to toxic mold.

Mycotoxin. Poison made by toxic mold.

Mycotoxin Gradient. The mixed air/toxin distance from spore accumulations that gives hits.

Mycotoxin Release. Period of time when toxic mold and mycotoxins increase in the outside air; often occurs during weather changes.

Neurotoxin. Any chemical that has a destructive effect on the brain.

Normie. An individual who is not unusually influenced by small amounts of toxic mold.

Overreactivity. Being affected by very small amounts of toxic mold to a much more dramatic extent than the average person.

Penicillium. A toxic mold that easily goes airborne.

Perceptify. Determine the presence of toxic mold in an environment or on an object by paying attention to physical, cognitive or emotional responses.

Personal Impact Rating (PIR). The extent to which an individual must make accommodation by avoidance with regard to the presence of toxic mold in order to be well.

Pfisteria. A dinoflagellate that carries a biotoxin.

Plume. A moving cloud of toxic mold spores, spore fragments and/or mycotoxins that causes an inside or outside area to be problematic for mold responders.

Plumed. Hit with a plume.

Poison Dust. Substance present in contaminated homes, comprised of toxic mold spore fragments and household dust carrying mycotoxins.

Potentiated Mycotoxins. Hypothesized substance made or distributed by toxic mold and incorporating chemicals from the environment.

Power Curve. Extent to which a reactive individual can tolerate additional mycotoxin exposures; being “on top of the curve” provides more resilience.

Pre-contaminated (or pre-molded). A building or item contaminated with toxic mold during the construction, manufacturing or distribution process.
**Pristine.** Free of a level of mycotoxins or other substances having a negative effect on a particular mold responder.

**Rainy Weather Response.** The tendency of mold responders to experience negative symptoms just before and during rainy periods.

**Raking.** Tendency of mold spores to move through the air in search of a location providing the conditions in which growth can occur.

**Reactivity.** The extent to which an individual suffers negative effects that are more than transitory as a result of exposures to toxic mold.

**Regular Bad Mold (or Regular Bad Stuff).** Toxic molds previously studied by researchers.

**Regular Mold.** Fungi that do not manufacture mycotoxins.

**Relative Shift.** The extent to which one environment is found to be significantly better or worse than another; can only be ascertained insofar as the mold responder is not carrying the response from the previous environment on hair or clothing.

**Remediation.** The process by which toxic mold is carefully removed from a building, thus making it comparatively safe for the majority of the population; generally is not sufficient for tolerance by extreme mold reactors.

**Safe Space (or Safe Zone).** An area in a living space that is kept as clear of toxic mold as possible.

**Satellite Colony.** A superficial growth of a toxic mold on an observable surface; suggests the presence of a problematic hidden growth.

**Satratoxin.** A trichothecene mycotoxin made by Stachybotrys.

**Secondary Contamination.** The transfer of mold spores and spore fragments from an item that has been exposed to toxic mold to another item.

**Secondary Metabolites.** Poisons released by toxic molds.

**Sensitivity.** The extent to which an individual can detect the presence of toxic mold based on physical reactions.

**Severe Responder (or Severe Reactor).** An individual who experiences negative symptoms as a result of exposure to very small amounts of mycotoxins.

**Shrieking Dream Response.** The tendency of mold responders to experience nightmares when sleeping in environments contaminated with mycotoxins or toxic mold.
**Sick Building.** A building that has a high level of toxic mold, often accompanied by other problematic chemicals.

**Sick Building Design.** A building design conducive to the growth of toxic molds and chemical toxicity, characterized by centralized duct systems, sealed windows and high levels of insulation.

**Sick Building Syndrome.** An environmental illness apparently set off by exposure to toxic mold (often along with toxic bacteria and/or toxic chemicals) in a work or home environment.

**Sick Region Syndrome.** Area of the country that has high levels of outdoor toxic mold.

**Slam.** A negative effect of a mold exposure that does not dissipate immediately upon obtaining distance from the item or area and the use of decontamination techniques.

**Sourcepoint.** A colony of mold that is emitting toxic spores.

**Spore.** The reproductive component of mold; toxic mold releases dormant spores that carry deadly poisons and that can remain viable for a very long time.

**Spore Cloud.** A clump of toxic mold spores and spore fragments existing in the air outdoors.

**Spore Fragment.** A piece of a dormant mold spore, especially one carrying mold toxin.

**Sporulate.** The release of dormant spores from a mold colony.

**Spot Plume.** The presence of toxic mold (or particularly problematic toxic mold) in just part of a building.

**Stachybotrys chartarum.** A damaging species of toxic mold.

**Stachybotrys.** A genus of mold that includes the species Stachybotrys chartarum or Stachybotrys atra; also known as “Stachy.”

**Suicide Response.** A brief but intense desire to kill oneself after experiencing a mold slam; may occur in extreme mold avoiders who otherwise have no suicidal inclinations or ideations.

**Suicide Season.** The period of time between November and February, when outdoor toxic mold often exerts particularly negative effects on mold responders.

**Super Bad Stuff.** A substance, yet to be studied, that has particularly problematic effects on mold responders.
**Super mold.** A particularly damaging toxic mold.

**Supertoxins.** A particularly damaging toxin.

**T-2.** A trichothecene mycotoxin made by the toxic mold Fusarium and present in moldy grains; has been used as a biological weapon.

**Tape Lift.** A sample of toxic mold used to identify the species that are present.

**Thermalling.** In hang gliding, seeking out pockets of air that have the potential of lifting the individual higher above the ground.

**Threshold of Discernment.** The level at which a particular individual can sense that toxic mold is present in the environment.

**Toxic Mold.** Certain species of mold that produce poisons that have a negative effect on people, animals, bacteria and/or other molds.

**Toxin.** A chemical substance that has a damaging effect on the body.

**Toxin Release.** The phenomenon by which adsorbed mycotoxins are released from objects; often occurs to an accelerated extent as a result of barometric pressure drops from weather changes or altitude increases.

**Trichothecenes.** Poisonous chemicals made by toxic molds such as Stachybotrys or Fusarium.

**Trigger.** A chemical substance that has an effect on a sensitive individual.

**Tumor Necrosis Factor Alpha (TNF).** A pro-inflammatory “killer” cytokine.

**Ulocladium.** A common mold often found on wet sheetrock; rarely is a toxin former.

**Universal Reactor.** Individual with especially severe Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, exhibiting negative reactions to a very wide variety of chemical substances.

**Unmasking.** Spending time in a relatively pristine area, so that the chronic negative effects of toxic mold (or other toxic substances) will begin to manifest themselves in acute symptoms upon exposure.

**Upregulate.** Physical reaction to exposure to toxic mold (or other substance), by which complement possibly becomes elevated.

**Vacuum Exacerbation Response.** A negative response of mold responders to the stirring up of spores as a result of vacuuming, cleaning or straightening up of an environment contaminated with toxic mold spores or dust.
**Van Der Waals Forces.** The possible action by which mycotoxins permanently bond with solid or porous objects, thus preventing them from being washed off or otherwise removed by forces other than denaturing.

**Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF).** Substance responsible for blood flow in capillaries; often low in biotoxin patients.

**Visual Contrast Sensitivity Test (VCS Test).** An eye exam that is said to detect the presence of toxins (such as mycotoxins and Lyme toxins) in the brain.

**Water Damaged Building (WDB).** A building that has had a water event such as a flood or leak, and thus may have been subject to mold growth.

**Water Event.** A flood, leak or other water intrusion into a building; should be addressed within 24 hours so that Stachy and other toxic mold does not begin to grow.

**Wilderness.** An area without man-made buildings; often but not always characterized by low levels of toxic mold.
Lake Tahoe in winter.

More Information

For more information about the role of mold toxins in chronic multisystem illness, please visit the Paradigm Change website.

www.paradigmchange.me