

The Sounds of the Sea campground

A campground on the north coast of California once served as a haven for people with severe chemical sensitivities.

Keywords: environmental illness, chemical sensitivity, MCS, housing, porcelain trailer, Ruth Noe, Susan Molloy, history

Ruth Noe became sick with multiple chemical sensitivities in the early 1980s. It became so severe that she could not leave her home in Marin County in California.

She was born in the Middle East, married an American and then moved to California. But now she was divorced and had no family in the area to help. Instead, she was helped by the local MCS support group and her church (Latter Day Saints, aka. the Mormons).

The house she lived in was not really safe enough and contributed to her illness. She heard from others that moving to a non-toxic house in unpolluted air should help. But how to do that? She couldn't go look herself and she had no money.

A local MCS activist, Susan Molloy, stepped in to help Ruth. She drove up and down the northern coast of California to look for a campground that could work. The most promising was The Sounds of The Sea, located near the hamlet Trinidad, north of Eureka.

Susan Molloy drove Ruth up to visit the campground and she agreed that it should work.

But Ruth could not live in a tent, and a regular trailer would be far too toxic. She needed a porcelain trailer which was custom built of inert materials for those with severe MCS.

A local television station made a very sympathetic program about Ruth. They interviewed her through the windows of her house to protect her against the TV crew's personal care products.

It was shown as part of the station's local news program. At the end they made a plea for the viewers to send money to help. This was some years before the chemical and tobacco industries started their smear campaigns in the 1990s, so the media was still sympathetic.

Then her church came through and offered to pay for the trailer. Since it was so costly it had to go through their headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The trailer was built by Dr. Lattieri in Texas and hauled to Ruth's home. There it had to sit for some time to air out. Once it was ready for Ruth to move into, it was hauled up to the campground.

The campground

The campground was located on the coast in a sparsely populated area when Ruth moved there about 1985. The wind came directly in from the ocean all day, every day.

Ruth's new trailer was parked on a high point that was a bit away from the rest of the campers. It worked very well. Ruth felt better and was able to go out more, though it was not a cure for her illness.

Other people in the same situation heard about the place and more MCS trailers arrived. They clustered together on the little hill, though it was never more than a handful at a time.

Some stayed for a summer, while others stayed for a couple of years until they could find something more comfortable and permanent.

The owner of the campground became a personal friend who tried to protect the MCS campers. The ownership changed, but the new owner continued to be sympathetic towards the sick people, who were steady customers.

It helped that the campground was rarely busy, and the other campers rarely caused trouble.

It was only during the fall salmon fishing season that there were a lot of difficulties. Then the campground was packed, and it was a different kind of clientele. The fishermen had campfires every night, where they grilled the fish, with the greasy smoke going everywhere. They were also smoking, drinking, and making a lot of noise at night.

Ruth and the other MCS-campers had to edure, sealed up inside their trailers. Some chose to leave for the winter.

Ruth was both the first and last MCS camper there. She stayed for ten or twelve years until her death from cancer. When she died there had not been any other MCS camper for a couple of years, and none followed.

Sources

Susan Molloy and the TV program mentioned in the article.

More stories

More stories about MCS camps at www.eiwellspring.org/multiunit.html.

More stories about the early days of environmental illnesses:
www.eiwellspring.org/history.html.