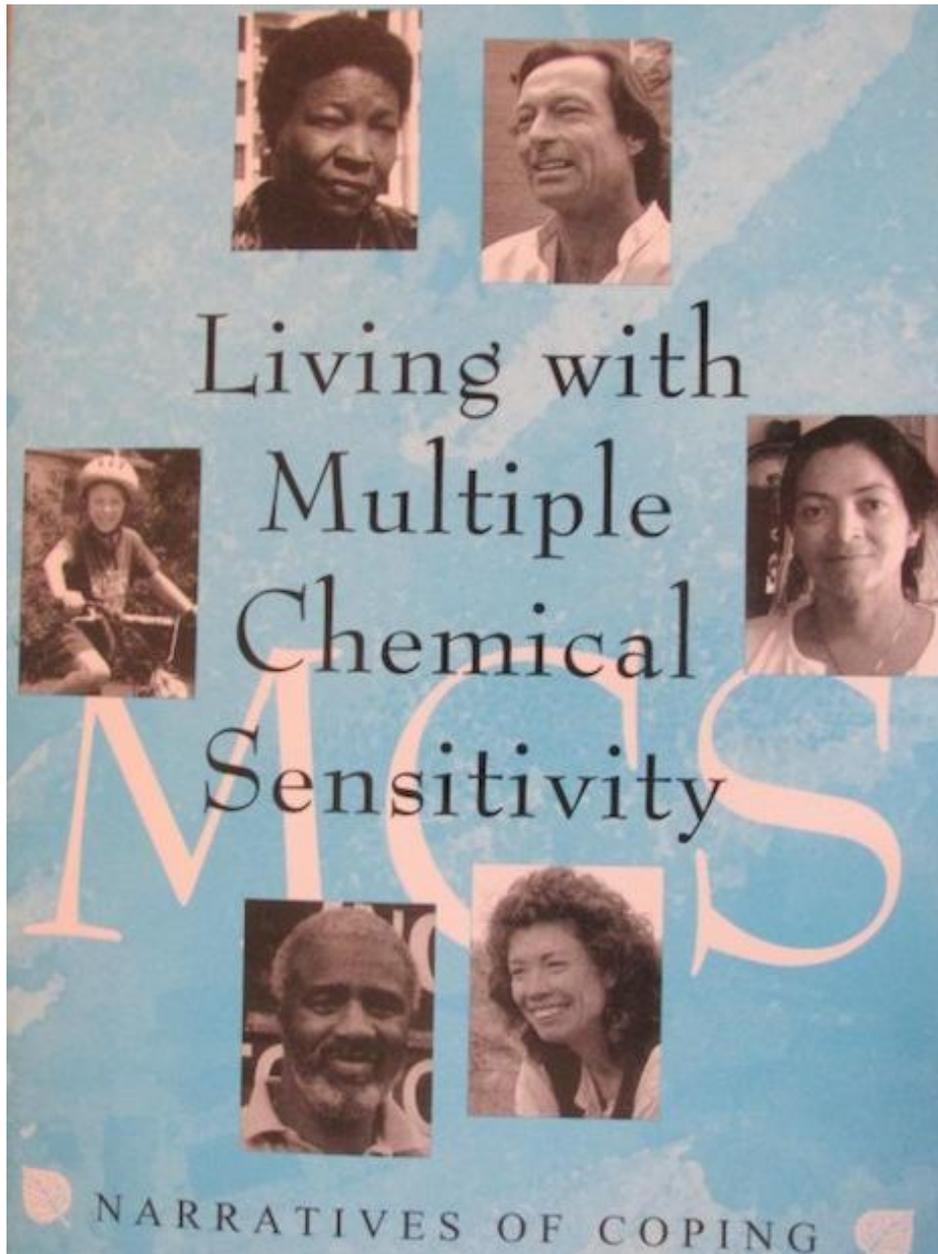


Living with multiple chemical sensitivity: narratives of coping by Gail McCormick

Book review



A collection of stories about living with multiple chemical sensitivity as told by thirty people from three countries.

Keywords: chemical sensitivity, MCS, stories, Susan Molloy, Ann McCampbell, Gail McCormick

Gail McCormick has MCS herself and traveled around the United States and Canada to interview people with MCS. She also interviewed a man from Belarus. In total there are thirty stories from a wide variety of people and situations, including two physicians, two college professors, a sports car mechanic, a massage therapist, a United Nations interpreter and election monitor, and several office workers. Many of them still held jobs, but several had to stop working.

The lineup is mostly white people of both sexes, but there is also one Native American and two blacks.

Five children from three families bring a youthful perspective.

There are all sorts of stories, from harassment by co-workers to people who end up living in their cars. Some stories are quite disturbing, such as:

When you tell people it makes you sick, some get very defensive and nasty. Some will go out of their way to spray you with a fragrance or chemical just to see if you'll turn blue (Jean MacKenzie).

There are also stories about hostile and ignorant physicians in many forms, such as one in Montreal who told a patient:

This sounds very much like sick building syndrome. I don't believe in sick building syndrome, I'm afraid I can't see you (Bernard Miller).

Several of the people became advocates or support group organizers. Some of them are legendary, such as Susan Molloy and Ann McCampbell.

One activist received death threats and someone dumped large amounts of pesticides in her yard (she still refused to budge).

Despite these stories, it is a hopeful book, as we also hear several stories of recovery, where the sick person is able to go back to work and live a somewhat normal life. There are also stories of spouses and families who do whatever it takes to deal with the illness.

The book doesn't sugarcoat all the bad stuff, but it nonetheless is able to remain positive so it is not a drag to read. The vast majority of stories are about people who have been sick for a long time and have been able to improve their situation.

These were all people whose plans for the future became interrupted by the illness – with some able to eventually continue with their lives.

There is a comprehensive index at the end of the book, which can be helpful for researching particular issues, such as harassment, relationships or advocacy work.

More information

More reviews of books about environmental illnesses are available at www.eiwellspring.org/booksandreviews.html.