

MY SICK BUILDING STORY

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah: 40.31

My story began when I went to work for a large HMO corporation, United HealthCare (now Uniprise) aka United Health Group, aka Metra Health, in an industrial park in Kingston, NY. I developed a sinus infection the first week I was there. That was in July, 1998. In September of 1998, I had another sinus infection or cold. There were 3 consequent doctor visits. In early December of 1998, I went to the doctor again to report severe muscle cramping throughout my body and extreme lower back pain. In early January, 1999, I went back to the doctor to report these same symptoms along with debilitating fatigue. I would have to lie down and sleep after such small chores as doing laundry.

I was unable to walk from my car in the parking lot to the building entrance without panting and much effort. I couldn't even walk a few yards inside the building without being exhausted and having shortness of breath. Concerned that I was having heart problems, an echocardiogram was done showing a normal heart, thank God. Never even gave my lungs a thought. The pain of the muscle cramping in all parts of my body was so severe that I would go to sleep at night crying. I went to work one morning with such a painful cramp under my left shoulder blade, that tears streamed down my face and the nurse was called to check me out. One night, charley horse cramps in both legs woke me up! If I bent down, I'd have cramping in my ribcage. Upon taking a short walk, I'd have cramping in my hips.

In early February of 1999, I was referred to the pulmonary specialist (Dr. James Saxon) in my medical group (Grand St. Medical) for possible pneumonia and also because of very low oxygen level. I was severely ill with flu-like symptoms. At that time, there was an epidemic of "flu" in our building. I was very heavily congested. After having x-rays, I was diagnosed with "interstitial lung disease", a fungal condition. When I stated to the doctor that this was from the building - that I couldn't breathe when I was in it, he said: "Intriguing!" and seemed very animated about this. I just found out (June, 2001) that he was intrigued because he had also treated a 38 year old man who died just prior to my employment with United HealthCare. This non-smoker, non-drinker, bodybuilder health nut died from "interstitial lung disease"! My arterial testing for bloodstream oxygen levels was VERY low! The doctor kept me out of work for a month to see if it was in fact the workplace that caused this problem. I knew that it was! At that time, Dr. Saxon did state to disability and sign off to UNUM that this was caused by the workplace. Also, when I called to report my continued absence from work, one of the personnel directors impulsively and excitedly asked: "Do you think it could be the building?". Dr. Saxon left the Grand St. Medical facility to work for United Healthcare or one of its affiliates shortly after his inquisition regarding the building. He had treated Joe, the poor young fellow who died from COPD and also Mike Levine, another victim of interstitial lung disease from that building. Mike did receive WC benefits and an unknown settlement for his injuries. He was represented by the law firm of Basch and Basch in Kingston NY.

As soon as I would enter the building, it felt as though the breath had been sucked out of me. I had a hard time concentrating on and retaining information on the more complicated mathematical cognitive processes during my training period. On occasion I had smelled formaldehyde when almost no one else could smell it. Only one other person was able to detect the odor. There had recently been a purchase of all new office

furniture which must have been outgassing formaldehyde that continually recirculated throughout the airtight building.

In 1997, two years prior to my current x-ray testing, I had had a clear chest x-ray. A multitude of blood tests proved all other allergens (dogs, cats, birds, etc.) to be negative. Dr. Saxon explained to me that the offending allergen was fungal. Stood to reason. There were always several wet ceiling tiles in the building, and many moldy discolored ones. There was a major leak where water streamed in when it rained in the conference room where we held our daily meetings. Waste baskets were used to contain the leaks, but furniture upholstery got saturated anyway. The rest rooms reeked so badly that when workers from other states visited, they would complain about them.

My oxygen level had returned to normal before I went back to work on March 1, 1999. I immediately began to get the same symptoms as before. On March 3, I went back to the doctor reporting difficulty breathing again and the burning low in my trachea. I asked him his thoughts on this and his answer to me with a patronizing pat on the shoulder was "this thing is bigger than you and I". He would not concede to my condition being caused by the building on this latest visit. His latest (October, 1999) answer to my problem was stated as, "this is a very controversial issue". He had obviously been "shut up".

On March 24th, another visit to the doctor revealed my oxygen level dropping again. On April 9th, I went back to report serious edema, shortness of breath, cramps in body, cough, and fatigue. My oxygen level was even lower. On April 14th, I went back in suffering with the same symptoms that were becoming more severe, especially the burning in my trachea and the edema. I was told that there was no proof that the building was causing this and was left to make a decision for myself. I decided that it was not worth living like this and compromising my health any further, so I left on my own. None of the Drs. in this Kingston, NY medical group (Grand St. Medical) would this time state that the workplace was causing my illness, though they are treating others with heavy meds who are working at United HealthCare. This was gross negligence for all of them to have further jeopardized my health by sending me back to work there and then keeping me there when tests and my physical condition had deteriorated again! The other employees will not complain because they have been there a while and cannot find jobs that pay as well in this area. So they continue to compromise their health risking possible future cancer and other life threatening conditions.

I've suffered emotionally, physically, and financially by the lack of commitment from doctors who don't want to get involved and no longer care about the patients they are treating. Without a statement saying that this illness was caused by the building, I cannot collect disability or Workman's Comp. The NYS Workman's Comp Board would't even hear my case without a statement from the doctor. The judge closed my case without a hearing!!! I was allowed to say two words in answer to the judge's question of whether I had a Dr's statement saying that this was caused by the workplace. The judge cut me short after the words "No, but....". So much for our right to fair hearings. I was never even offered counsel. I believe that NYS has some liability in this.

EPA would not investigate this building on the complaint of one person. They needed 2 complaints to investigate! Even given the facts that a 38 year old health nut bodybuilder who didn't smoke or drink died of a interstitial lung disease while working there, that there were 5 cases of myocarditis in which 1 or 2 people died, that the cancer and heart attack rate is very high there, that another woman left with a vocal chord ailment caused by the air in there, that there was questionable monitoring of the air upon complaints (a monitor was put in the hallway near the door instead of inside the workplace areas and OSHA had never been there as was reported to me and others), EPA still refuses to get involved. There have been between 300 and 600 employees in this building through the years. Even though United HealthCare's assistant personnel director waved air quality reports in my face, they refused to

send my Environmental Specialist the reports.

Prior to my working in this building, I was a very active healthy person. I've done much laborious heavy work during my other career in sales. While I am regaining my strength (at this writing, I've been out of work for 10 months) and feel so much better with oxygen level now at normal, I am still affected by much normal activity such as taking long walks because of the pulmonary fibrosis scarring in my lungs. I still need to rest and sleep after any kind of exertion.

I don't know what kind of toxins I was inhaling from the building, but the edema is gone. I still wonder if I have any toxic residue that will cause problems in the future for me. My sed rate continues to be high, but other blood tests are normal now. The sed rate is a mystery to my doctor (now at another medical group). Hopefully, in time, the toxins will be released from my bloodstream. I will always have this scarring in my lungs and the limitations of activity from it unfortunately. The chronic fatigue, according to other reports I've read, may still remain with me indefinitely. My thyroid level was low. I couldn't get warm, even in the summer. It finally stabilized. Then my liver enzymes went way up. I was diagnosed with fatty liver, but the cause remains a mystery to my doctors.

United HealthCare (now Uniprise) knows the extent of the problems there, but ignore it with their continued criminal negligence. Their answer to other reasonable accommodation for me to continue to work there under the Americans with Disabilities Act was to offer me work in another section of the building with the same air system. It was their responsibility to have an OSHA certified firm inspect the building within 30 days of my complaint, but that was NEVER done. It's been 9 months since my first complaint and inspection has still not been done - or if it has, the results have been kept strictly confidential. UHC voluntarily kept me on "leave of absence" for nine months after I announced my resignation.

The doctor's group would not allow me to have my medical records until I sent them a certified letter stating that it was my legal right to have copies. I've since obtained them, but not in their entirety. The vendor handling my disability case (UNUM - which now has a class action lawsuit against them) kept my records from me for weeks before I found out that I had been denied disability. The employer told me and their other complainants that OSHA was there on a regular basis inspecting the building. Through the Freedom of Information Act, I found out that OSHA had never been there!

That's my story. Not quite in a nutshell, yet not as detailed as I would have liked it to be. If you feel that you're a victim of SBS, get out before it destroys you. Don't be like the person who has been carried out of this building on a regular basis by the ambulance at least 6 times for fainting and who has been treated by the same doctor's group I was going to with heavy meds. This person is a very young attractive thin person who has admitted to me how health has been compromised in lieu of the good salary. Life is too short and too precious to make that kind of compromise.

EPILOGUE: This mega-company former employer kept me on leave of absence for 9 months until they knew I was legally and politically empty. If they weren't guilty, why would they have paid for my benefits for such a long time?

I was given an ultimatum to go back to work or lose benefits. The letter mentioned giving me "special accommodations". I went back for 1 day. No one ever met with me about special accommodations. In a most negligent and thoughtless way, I was put back into a training room with people with the flu and laryngitis all around me. My nose ran constantly all day. I did not go back and notified them that I would go back when CDC comes out with their environmental testing and then with an oxygen monitor on me

or arterial testing done daily. Needless to say, I was terminated.

My only recourse now is to continue my search for those who have had to leave this company for the same reasons and to go to the media. Myself and others are continually creating a new national awareness of workplace problems. We have been successful in pursuing major media and local media where applicable to create more awareness of this widespread problem.

Three years later (summer of 2001), Uniprise gutted the part of the building in which I worked and completely "redecorated". The contractors did not wear protective clothing or respirators, and so have exposed themselves to the lethal combination of "stuff" in the walls. They also further exposed the employees to the elements by not putting up a dust barrier. The employees complained of the amount of *dust* that encompassed them.

As I talk with former and current employees of Uniprise, I continue to hear of the horror stories: a young girl who had pregnancy problems and gave birth to a baby that remained hospitalized for quite some time and then died at the age of 2 months; a case of lymphoma in a young girl; a case of thyroid cancer in another young woman; and breast cancer in another young woman.

In 2005, I was operated on for a benign tumor. Pathology report showed it was fungal in nature.

In 2011, I was operated on for a pituitary brain tumor that neurosurgeons said I've had for longer than 10 years. It is a known fact that mold attacks the adrenal glands causing adrenal insufficiency.

IF YOU THINK YOU ARE A VICTIM OF SBS IN THE KINGSTON, NY AREA, I'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU. Use the contact link below. All information received will be held in strictest confidence.

10/00/00 UPDATE: After my June 2000 visit to Dr. Johanning, world reknowned expert on toxic mold, I sent by certified letter his request for the last 10 years' of air quality test reports. I also requested them by e-mail. To date, United HealthCare has not complied. Dr. Johanning was referred to me by OSHA. He was with the Eastern New York Occupational & Environmental Health Center, but is now practicing privately. During my meeting with United HealthCare human resource representatives about how they could offer my special accommodations, air quality reports were waved at me so I know that they do in fact exist.

11/12/00 UPDATE: See the link below for *HOT* news about contamination in the complex in which I worked.

2/14/01 UPDATE: Firstly, the Taiwan News has contacted me for permission to quote some of this website. Secondly, a support group has formed in the Albany, NY area. Hopefully, we will be able to join forces to bring to light the plight of those of us who have been permanently crippled in this area.

3/19/01 UPDATE: Rumor has it that my former company will be undergoing major renovation of their building, including tearing up carpets. Right after I left, roof remediation was performed in the area where I worked. Such a shame that they neglected to do this before people died and became ill. Of course, now the new carpeting will create a dangerous outgassing of the highly carcinogenic formaldehyde in this airtight building just as all of the new office furniture has been.

5/10/01 UPDATE: New quick, simplified and thorough mold testing equipment is on the horizon. New DNA testing will also be able to correlate the victim to the offending source. Some tests are already available. Other equipment is only months away!

SUMMER 2002 UPDATE: The part of the building in which I worked was "renovated" by an out of state construction firm. The workers did not wear any type of protective clothing, thus exposing themselves to the conditions therein. They also did not take any care to prevent the dust and particles from being blown into the rest of the building. The employees were upset with the mess that encompassed them. This shoddy and uncaring, unprofessional attempt to "remediate" the situation has probably worsened it by spreading the organisms throughout the rest of the building. When mold is dry and airborne, it is in its most dangerous form since it is then easily inhaled, ingested and blown into clothing, etc. These poor employees have probably by now tracked the toxic mold home with them.

1/13/03 UPDATE: UNUM Provident, the disability vendor for United HealthCare, is being investigated and sued for denying claims [www.corporatecrimefighters.com]. UNUM allowed my short term disability, but denied me long term disability because they said that the doctor had not claimed that it was the building that caused my illness. However, a caring UNUM rep advised me that I should ask for my records because the doctor did in fact check the building as the cause of the illness. Dr. Saxon left the Grand St. Medical firm shortly after I left United HealthCare. It has been reported that he went to work for United HealthCare.

10/23/04 UPDATE: New information is brought to light regarding more disease of employees at UHC. Also received new information regarding UHC's foreknowledge of the condition of the building as it related to deaths and illness from this sick complex. I, therefore, hold United HealthCare Group and Edgewater Corporation guilty of negligence in the deaths and illness of many of their employees. IBM has also neglected to clean up the contamination for decades now.

MEDIA ATTENTION:

06/18/13 edition of [DAILY FREEMAN](#): State notice on TechCity site pollution cleanup effort cheers officials
03/01/13 edition of [DAILY FREEMAN](#): Tech City Contamination Taking Comments 03/19/11 edition of [DAILY FREEMAN](#): Tech City Contamination">[DAILY FREEMAN](#): Tech City Contamination
02/04/11 edition of [DAILY FREEMAN](#): IBM critical of TechCity's plan for former Ulster plant 01/03/11 edition of [DAILY FREEMAN](#): Tech City Contamination
07/21/02 edition of [WEEKEND USA TODAY](#): Apartments: The Next Mold Front
06/05/00 edition of [BUSINESS WEEK](#): "Is Your Office Killing You?"
11/12/00 edition of [THE DAILY FREEMAN](#): Contamination at IBM property halts purchase by horse show operator
11/30/00 edition of [THE DAILY FREEMAN](#): Contamination at former IBM Rec Center worries Ulster leaders
12/11/00 edition of [BUSINESS WEEK](#): "[What's That Smell?](#)"
02/04/01 edition of [THE DAILY FREEMAN](#): Concerns linger about toxins at IBM rec site
10/19/01 edition of [THE DAILY FREEMAN](#): Cleanup Work at ex-IBM site to begin next month



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