

Linda Delp

I am writing to tell how my family has been destroyed by toxic mold. I originally became ill when I was living in a home with mold growing in the walls. This was a rental property that I lived in with no problems for about 8 years. It was a very nice house, but the landlord didn't properly maintain the property. For years, the driveway was cracking from tree roots and eventually cracks formed around the foundation which resulted in mold growing in the basement walls.

This happened in 1998, and I had never heard of this problem, so I tried to educate myself when the Health Department showed me the mold. I really didn't know who to call, but I assumed the Health Department would help me or lead me in the right direction. I called them because I felt very ill almost immediately when the Spring arrived two years in a row. The first year, I suddenly became very weak, and it lasted most of the summer. I was very active, 44 years old at the time, and full of life--bowling several times a week and going to night school, busy with my daughter and her schoolwork, etc. Suddenly, I had no energy at all. I could smell an odor in the house, but I couldn't detect where it was coming from. It smelled like it was in the wood. I noticed that I would feel better when I was out, and I would smell an odor that would almost hit me in the face upon returning home.

At first, I did as most people would do. I would air out the house, light a candle or something. Soon I started to put things together and thought I better call someone to check it out. The doctor first treated me for a sinus infection with antibiotics, and I seemed okay when winter arrived. Then the following Spring, the same thing happened. I was very weak and started to have sinus pain and breathing problems. Again I was treated with antibiotics. When that didn't work, we tried a stronger dose of antibiotics. Next, I had an allergic reaction twice in a week. They called it severe urticaria.

After going to the emergency room twice, they told me to get to an allergist. This doctor treated me with steroids and other medications for several months for the allergic reaction and sinus infection. Then the doctor said I had asthma and reactive airways disease. A CAT scan revealed all of my sinuses were infected even after all the steroids and antibiotics. The allergist sent me next to the ENT (sinus doctor) because I might need sinus surgery.

We had been trying to get the landlord to clean up the mold throughout this time, but they were ignoring our calls. We decided not to renew the lease and go on a month-to-month lease until they cleaned up the mold. My husband had just had foot surgery, and I was so ill that moving almost seemed impossible at that time. Finally, the landlord decided to clean up the mold, but first they wanted to paint. By this time, six months had passed, but at least my sinuses were showing some improvement according to a CAT scan in December 1998.

On New Year's Day 1999, the landlord started removing wallpaper and painting. They were using different chemicals, and I was very concerned about my health. I was told that by law they were allowed to do whatever remodeling they wanted to do regardless of my health problems. We were trying to protect ourselves the best we could by hanging up sheets in doorways and sleeping in the living room where they were not working. The painting went on for 3 -4 weeks. By the time they were done, I was scheduling sinus surgery. Next, the landlord said we had to move out in 6 weeks. Because we were on a month-to-month lease until they cleaned up the mold, they had the legal right to tell us the lease was up.

Even after living there all those years and I took such good care of the home, we were basically being thrown out like the trash. I was devastated that this could happen. Of course, we knew we would have to leave, but not when I was headed for sinus surgery. And, to top it off, the landlord wanted to have the windows replaced a week or so before my surgery. They never did any work like this in all the years we were there and all of a sudden they had to do everything when I was so ill. I couldn't believe it, and I tried to call everyone I could think of including the attorney general's office, the American Lung Association, etc., but no one helped.

I had the sinus surgery, but it was a difficult recovery. They removed polyps that were in between my eyes and I had tissue damage by my cheek. I was already quite thin, and it took quite a while before I could eat because I vomited for several weeks. It was awful. I was so afraid that I was going to have to go in the basement where the mold was to prepare for the move before I had a chance to recover from the operation. We had so much we had collected through the years for my daughter to give to her children, special Barbie items, books, computers, etc. There was so much to go through and I knew it was dangerous for me, but we had no money for movers and had to do the work ourselves. The doctor gave me masks to wear and I wore goggles, but I had a very difficult time with the move. One night during the move, my nose started bleeding and huge pieces of blood chunks were coming out of my nose. I was so scared.

We finally moved and had to throw out many of our belongings because we decided to move to an apartment. At the time, I had no idea there were dangerous molds in that home, so we would have had to get rid of a lot anyway. We moved to Arbor Point Apartments. We thought we had done the right thing by moving into that apartment and that our troubles were behind us. We were doing pretty well, but I was still trying to recover from the move and the surgery. I started seeing a neurologist because I was having a nervous tic problem that was getting worse.

About 3 months after we moved into the apartment, there was a really heavy rain one night. The next morning the carpet was wet by my bed. Upon further inspection, I found black stuff under the carpet and on the wall. I couldn't believe it. I knew it was mold. I went to the office and told them about it and about the problems I had with mold. They came to the apartment about a week later, and they cut out some of the drywall and there was black mold growing in the insulation.

Apparently the underground gutters failed, so we decided we should move into another apartment. I didn't want trouble. I just wanted to be safe. We moved to another apartment after waiting about 5 months, but it was in the same building. They promised to clean up the mold in the first apartment on the first floor, so we moved and signed a release thinking everything would be okay. They never cleaned up the apartment on the first floor, and I was on the second floor. The air systems leaked, and I knew how dangerous it could be with the mold still actively growing on the first floor. Months went by and I was getting worse.

During this time, I called the Health Department again. I also called our State Representative. I was tired of fooling around and wanted help. He sent the Health Department to the apartment to test the air and inspect the place. The mold was clearly a problem. The man said he would have to return later, but he never returned. When I called the Health Department again, they told me that the Representative's office said to do nothing.

Even the New York Guidelines, which we are supposed to go by, state that any kind of mold should be cleaned up immediately. Mold is not to be left to grow indefinitely. I just wanted them to do right by my family, but they made us move out when our lease expired, so we were faced with trying to find a safe place again. The stress was mounting and I didn't know what to do. I decided to see if I could get some help from a lawyer. It was difficult getting someone who had heard of mold. The entire process was very stressful. Finally I found a lawyer who had handled a mold case before, but he told me how difficult it could be to prove. At first he didn't want to take the case, but he said if I got samples of the mold and got the doctors to connect my illness with the home, he would help.

Unfortunately, I had to wait 8 months for an appointment with a mold doctor in NY. The lawyer drew up the papers for a personal injury case, but on the day we went to sign the papers he said he wasn't going to represent me because he was friends with one of the parties in the lawsuit. That day was also the last day of our statute of limitations. It was wrong that he did that to us. Since we were out of time, I had to handle the case on my own until I could find another lawyer.

Most of the lawyers in my state had affiliations with the people I was suing, so it was difficult to find a lawyer to help us. I found lawyers across the country who were interested in my case, and I finally found a New York lawyer, but the judge would not give me time to get a local lawyer. Many lawyers across the

U.S. were afraid of the Delaware Courts. They said it was a very corporate state, and I would find it difficult to win here. I tried to explain the complexity of a toxic mold case to the judge and I needed more time. The judge was in a hurry to schedule the start of trial, so he would not give me any extra time. I had the evidence—doctors' reports linking my illness to the home--but I was just a tiny sick girl against the big-time lawyers. I was told that I did a good job on my case by many lawyers. I spent a year working so hard trying to get justice, so that I would not be where I am today still suffering and now no health insurance.

I am at a loss about what to do now. We were in the process of moving during the 9/11 tragedy. Right before the move, my husband had a major seizure in the lawyer's office and was rushed to the hospital. The stress and the toxins from the move caused my husband's health problems. It was bad enough that we were treated so poorly by every avenue we pursued but to lose our health at such a young age was wrong. I now get very ill around fragrances and cooking odors and having trouble eating. Fragrances are an irritant, and people with asthma and reactive airways disease can't be around those chemicals.

I also have a chronic yeast problem on my tongue. I asked the ENT to test my tongue, and it was candida albicans. It can get into your blood stream and into your gut and cause serious problems. I am afraid that is where I am now, but I can't be sure because the last time I went to my family doctor he refused to read any literature regarding yeast even though my white blood count was elevated. I asked him if he could test me for food allergies and try to address the yeast problem. I kept leaving phone messages, but he never returned my calls.

I went to see the mold doctor in New York after waiting 8 months for my appointment. It was a great appointment, but that doctor resigned a few weeks after my visit.. It took a long time to get the report of my visit, and I didn't even get treated. He called my local doctors to suggest a strong anti fungal medication. The medication was \$400.00 a month, so I had to stop taking it because of the expense.

When things happen like this, you think the people in charge would do the right thing, but that is not always the case. They tell you to contact your representatives, but if you are calling about something they don't understand or don't agree with, they can be rude and unwilling to help. I tried to educate many people about the mold problem and the problem with these chemicals in our products. There is literature all over the place regarding toxic mold, fragrances, and the chemicals in our products. Our government does not regulate these chemicals that are in our products.

There are no regulations regarding mold clean-up. No help for family's living this nightmare. We are just left to fend for ourselves. I am not an activist. I'm just a mother who has lost almost everything, and all I did was try to get help for my family. I have been paying the price since the very day I tried to get help. This is not right, and I don't know who to trust. Isn't there somebody who can help us?

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