

U.S. & WORLD BUSINESS HEALTH FAMILY

# NJ man finds source of his illness

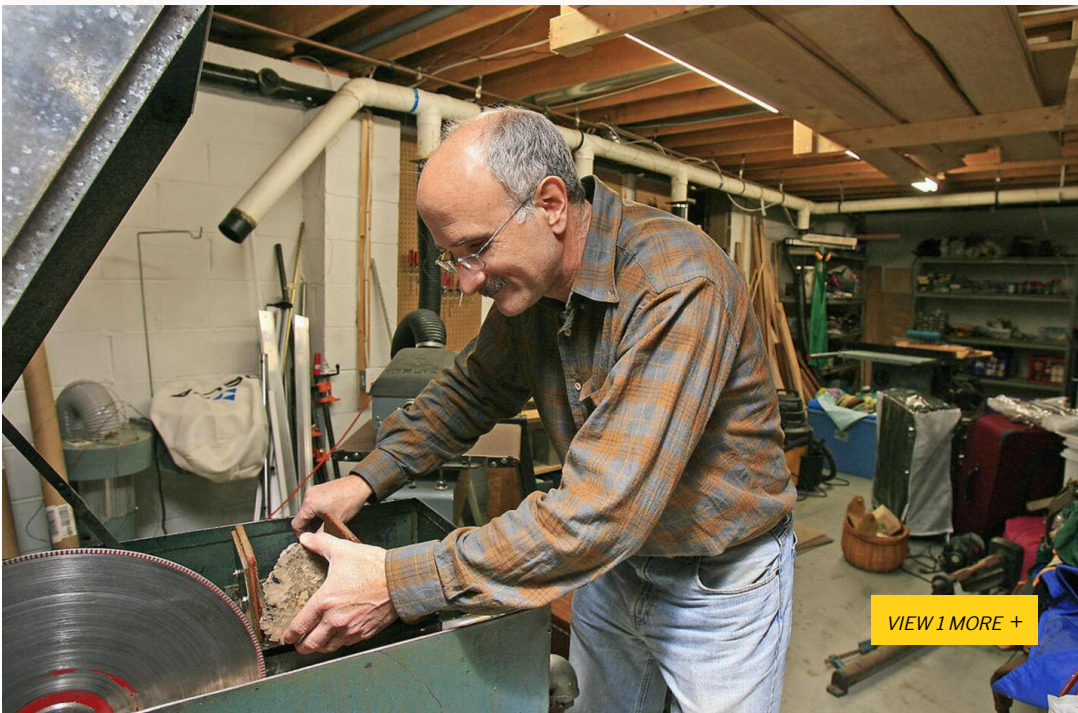
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In this Dec. 17, 2010 photo, Gerald Feigin uses a rock saw to prepare to cut one of his rock collections, in the basement where he had a mold problem, in Sewell, N.J. After months of sleeping in a backyard tent and then in a condominium away from his fami | The Philadelphia Inquirer, Akira Suwa) MAGS OUT; NO SALES; NEWARK OUT, Associated Press

**By Deseret News, Jan Hefler, The Philadelphia Inquirer**

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP, N.J. — The South Jersey medical examiner had a hunch that something lurking in his house was slowly killing him. Was it mold in his basement? Contaminated drinking water?

Or could it be little Dinky, Gerald Feigin's innocent-looking but constantly shedding Chihuahua-terrier mix?

Until now, Feigin wasn't sure.

For the last 18 months, the pathologist alternately slept in his backyard tent (with a heater) and a rented condominium while he tried to figure out why he continually felt like there was a "knife twisting in my gut."

Feigin recently returned to his home in Washington Township, Gloucester County, and was reunited with his wife and teenage son. His first suspect — black mold — was finally discovered, buried behind insulation in his hobby-filled, partially finished basement.

Previous consultants had ruled out mold and its byproduct, mycotoxins, but they were dead wrong, Feigin now says. His backup theory - an allergy to Dinky - also proved false.

"It wasn't the dog. . . . He could have had some mold on him," Feigin said, explaining why a red bump appeared on his skin when he injected himself with a bit of Dinky's fur. He had considered giving Dinky away if he didn't get answers soon.

"I think I was looking for an excuse, a reason," after several contractors, mold-abatement specialists, and environmental consultants discounted mold as the cause of his illness, he said. One contractor even drilled holes into his stucco walls and couldn't find it.

Feigin, 55, who has testified in numerous murder trials in Camden, Gloucester, and Salem Counties during the last dozen years, is relieved his personal odyssey is over. He had consulted seven specialists, and many concluded it was a rare allergy. Each morning when he awoke in his house, he would have upper gastrointestinal tract pains that lasted all morning.

Feigin has been back home for a few weeks and says he feels much better. "I can go in the basement and start my woodworking and shining and polishing my rocks," he said.

The cost of the investigation and cleanup was about \$20,000 and covered a slew of environmental tests, dehumidifiers, and eventually the mold remediation. Half was reimbursed by his insurance company.

In fact, it was Feigin's insurance adjustor who spotted the mold.

Workers spent a week tearing down the wallboard and insulation and scrubbing the cinderblock with a mold detergent. Finally, the walls were water-proofed, and the ducts were sanitized.

Many people mistakenly think that all they have to do is use bleach to kill mold, said John Cucinotta, whose company, First Choice Environmental L.L.C. in Cherry Hill, handled the project. But detergent is needed to kill 100 percent of the mold.

Finding mold can involve a good bit of detective work, said Cucinotta, who usually spends hours hunting for it.

"In closets where the walls weren't Sheetrocked, we used cameras" to find the black mold that plastered a 10- by 15-foot section of Feigin's front basement wall, he said. He also found troublesome white powdery mold on the joists. He inspected the crawl space and identified the problem: downspouts that were not diverting water away from the home.

Feigin's earlier consultants did not find mycotoxins, or mold byproduct, because they are airborne and scattered throughout an area, said Cucinotta, who has been in the business 42 years.

"People should just locate the source - the mold - and not bother with all the testing," he

said.

Feigin's wife, Jane, a paralegal, is thrilled the ordeal is over, she said. From the beginning, she had suspected mold but was continually told that it was something else. She purchased bottled water, replaced a refrigerator that she suspected did not keep the food cold enough, installed new carpets, and fastidiously cleaned the basement.

"Thank God, I feel vindicated," she told the insurance adjustor when he informed her of the findings.

Her advice for other people worried an illness might be linked to something in their home? "If you have a nondescript medical problem that you can't put your finger on, start with a list - and it can be a very long list," she said. "Then start eliminating things."

Information from: The Philadelphia Inquirer, <http://www.philly.com>



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