



a dual power production

2013 / 56 Minutes
Documentary

Directed by Susan Abod
Produced by Basil Shadid & Susan Abod
Camera by Laurel Greenberg
Edited by Alex Perrault

TITLE

Homesick

LOG LINE

Where's your home when homes make you sick?

25 WORD DESCRIPTION

Susan Abod hits the road to discover how people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities are finding safe housing and coping with this little known epidemic.

50 WORD DESCRIPTION

Imagine your home is making you dangerously sick. You could be one of the millions suffering from Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS).

Susan Abod hits the road to discover how people with MCS are able to find safe housing. Join Susan as she discovers how people are coping with this 21st century illness.

150 WORD DESCRIPTION

Imagine your house is making you dangerously sick. Common products like paint, carpeting, new building materials and insecticides are now your worst enemies. Your bones ache, you're feverish, you suffer from extreme headaches, disabling fatigue, mental confusion, asthma and nausea. The longer you stay in your house, the sicker you get but you can't imagine how or where you're going to find a safe home. You are one of the millions suffering from the silent epidemic of Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS).

In *Homesick*, Susan Abod hits the road to learn whether other people with MCS are finding safe housing. On her journey to the Southwestern United States, Susan meets people from all walks of life. Their living quarters range from a house on stilts to tents and a teepee.

Join Susan as she explores a little known world and discovers how people are coping with this growing epidemic.

FULL DESCRIPTION

Coal miners used to send canaries into the mines ahead of them to check the level of lethal gases. If the canaries died, the gasses had reached deadly levels. If they lived, it was safe to mine.

Today, we find ourselves facing an insidious, growing public health problem - we are being made sick by our environment. More and more of us are becoming allergic to common, everyday surroundings at work, at home and in public places. About 10 million people are afflicted with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) in the United States alone. According to a national survey, 11.2% of the population report varying degrees of "hypersensitivity to common chemicals" (Caress & Steinemann, National Prevalence of Asthma & Chemical Hypersensitivity JOEM Vol 47. No. 5 May 2005). According to an article in Business Week (May 2000), the population that is allergic to chemicals will grow to 60% by 2020.

MCS is a chronic condition marked by greatly increased sensitivity to many different chemicals, such as new paint, carpeting, cosmetics, tobacco smoke, pesticides, automobile exhaust, gas stoves, and many commercial household-cleaning products, among other things.

Although women are affected more often than men, MCS occurs in people of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds.

People who live with MCS commonly suffer from debilitating symptoms provoked by chemical exposures. These symptoms include shortness of breath, migraines, gastrointestinal problems, aching joints and muscles, weakness, memory loss, impaired balance and concentration problems and even seizures and anaphylactic shock. There is no known cure for MCS.

The biggest issue for those with MCS is creating a safe home environment where chemical exposures are minimal.

In *Homesick*, Susan takes viewers on a road trip to experience how drastically MCS has altered the lives of its victims. Through her extensive research, which includes over thirty interviews, Susan explores the lives of doctors, architects, teachers, housewives and students living with this disease. She takes us into these brave survivors' non-toxic homes, which include tents, a house on stilts and a teepee. Susan is the connecting thread between these stories as she narrates the journey from her MCS-accessible van.

Its almost inevitable that anyone with significant chemical sensitivities will sometimes be homeless or live in substandard housing. Typically, people with MCS are forced to move from one place to the next because their homes become unsafe by the use of chemicals by neighbors, landlords and others. All too often they may find themselves homeless or are forced to live in toxic spaces where their health deteriorates. Tragically, the overwhelming nature of this illness and the difficulty of locating safe housing has resulted in a number of suicides.

Homesick explores the daily struggle of people with MCS. It takes us into their homes to show just how debilitating this disease is and how difficult and imperative it is for chemically sensitive people to find and keep safe housing. Because Susan herself has extensive chemical sensitivities, the film is a thoughtful, compassionate and sometimes even humorous look at life with MCS.

Perhaps because its ramifications are so frightening, MCS continues to be denied by society. The advances of industrialized civilization have brought us to an age in which our daily lives are dominated by the use of plastics and other synthetic chemicals in our food, water, shelter, health care and transportation. People suffering with MCS serve to make us aware of the dire consequences of living in a society where chemicals are used in virtually every area of our lives.

The importance of this film is not limited to those who suffer from MCS, because unhealthy housing affects us all.

One of the foremost questions of the 21st century has become: How do we create a sustainable environment? We can begin by taking heed of the plight these human canaries.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

After watching the film *'Broadcast Tapes of Dr. Peter'* (HBO, July, 1993), the Academy Award nominated feature documentary I was inspired to make my own film about my experiences living and coping with CFIDS and MCS. Three years later, *Funny You Don't Look Sick, An Autobiography of an Illness* premiered at the Museum of Fine Arts and won a Merit Award at the 2005 International Disability Film Festival and distributed nationally by the Cinema Guild. I have been coping with this illness and have been documenting it for over a two decades. In the follow up, *Homesick* I venture out to the Southwest to find others with MCS.

During the final editing of *Funny You Don't Look Sick*, I began to ask myself how many others were going through this nightmare, too? How did they get sick? Were they having as much trouble as I was finding and keeping a safe place to live? How were they coping with such an overwhelming and often isolating condition? Did safer housing improve their health? Was one area of the country safer to live in than another, such as the Southwest where many people with MCS have migrated?

I felt compelled to make a second film in which I explored these questions, exposed the widespread and fast-growing impact of this illness, and examined the critical importance of safe housing as both prevention and treatment for MCS, using my own search for a safe home as the central narrative thread.

Homesick follows my literal journey with MCS, as I go on a road trip to find others coping with this disability and discover if and how they have created safe housing. Through personal portraits, the film reveals the human face of this devastating condition, helping to raise awareness, increase compassion and challenge the misinformation and stigma that surrounds it.

I go on the road to find people around the country who are coping with MCS. I travel to New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Texas, where many people with MCS have migrated in search of less industrialized environments. I visit their homes and witness their daily struggles. I meet architects, teachers, housewives, social workers, lawyers, nurses, doctors, artists and students. The similarity of each person's story is staggering. Their homes include tents, a house on stilts, a straw bale house and a teepee. I have also revisited these people nine years after the original filming to find out how they are managing now. My findings are disturbing, inspiring and I hope, useful.

HOMESICK BACKSTORY

Susan started making Homesick in 1997. Released in 2013, this increasingly relevant documentary provides a story that is needed now more than ever. Homesick documents the physical and emotional experiences of people with MCS through personal portraits, bringing a human face to an often-unseen population. This serves to lessen their isolation and increase their acceptance in their communities and even in their own families, where they are often misunderstood or disbelieved.

Through these stories, Homesick educates the public about the nature and impact of Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, and in particular, the unique access needs of people with MCS. By focusing on the importance of safe housing, the film helps people who are currently ill and can help prevent others from becoming sick. It helps people with MCS to find out about available resources, and helps them to educate their personal support networks. It also helps to connect people with MCS to the broader community of people with disabilities, and can alert those with chronic respiratory, immune or neurological conditions to environmental factors that may be impacting their health. Homesick is a wake up call to those who feel ill, but perhaps have not recognized environmental factors that may be contributing to the cause of their poor health, such as Gulf War veterans, 9/11 first responders, and those living in the polluted aftermath of Katrina and the BP oil spill.

Susan's Story:

Twenty years ago I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS) and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS). From that point on my life changed completely. Before I got sick, I was singing professionally in clubs and concerts and teaching music. Now, MCS controls where I live, what I eat, what I wear, where I go, what I buy (or, more often, what I do not buy), even whom I hug. My own housing history since having MCS is a typical one: I had been renting an apartment in Somerville, MA for 5 years when my landlord informed me I needed to vacate, for her newly married daughter. It took a year to find a rental (a friend owned) in neighboring Watertown that I could tolerate. I lived there fairly successfully (documented in "Funny You Don't Look Sick", 1995) except for the time my landlord unwittingly put down treated cedar chips right under my first floor windows.

I was forced to leave immediately. I hastily made an arrangement to sleep on a friend's kitchen floor until I arranged to have the chips removed. Then a year later, the owner decided to sell the house and wanted my place vacant. In 1996, I received a court ordered extension of 12 months so I could stay in a safe place, while I looked for another. Three weeks before the order was up, I found an apartment that would be my next home for 8 years. This is documented in my first film "Funny You Don't Look Sick".

HOMESICK TIMELINE

1997

Susan received an ADA grant from Very Special Arts.

The initial filming of her 6-week road trip with a professional camerawoman, Laurel Greenberg takes place

1997 - 2001

When Susan returns from the road trip Susan's own health and housing problems prevents work on the film... for the next five years.

2002

Brad Kimbrough volunteers and edits a draft of Homesick at Newton's Cable access station. The first 120-minute rough cut of Homesick is completed.

2003

With the help of editor Richard Fomo, an 8-minute fundraising trailer of Homesick is produced.

Meanwhile, Susan's health rapidly declines due to increasing mold levels in the basement of her apartment. The owner of her building decided he could not afford to remediate. Susan needed another place to live and knew it would take a long time to look. It was the beginning of an exhaustive housing search that lasted over 3 years, eventually bringing her to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

2004

The 8-minute trailer of Homesick is put on the Homesick website. According to the web server statistics, there have been 91,154 successful requests to view this video. These viewers are potentially local, regional and international in geography.

2006

The Homesick 8-minute trailer is screened at the MCS Town Hall in Santa Fe viewed by Secretary Pam Hyde, Human Services Dept., Secretary Michelle Lujan Grisham, Dept. of Health, Secretary Deborah Armstrong, Aging & Long-Term Services Dept., the Secretary of Children, Youth, and Families and The Deputy Secretary Public Education Department.

2007

The Homesick Trailer becomes a finalist in the Third NM Governor's Cup Film Competition.

The Homesick Trailer is screened 3 times to capacity crowds at the Santa Fe Film Center

The Homesick Trailer is screened at Santa Fe's Center For Contemporary Art's as part of their Megabytes 4 Festival.

2008 - 2009

Susan, in association with the North 4 Arts Center in Albuquerque, applied for and received funds from the NM Governor's Commission on Disability's Quality of Life grant. A local editor created a second rough cut although there were not enough funds to get the film to where Susan wanted it to be.

2010 - 2011

Susan got more ill, and at this time, felt like she had finally to give up on the idea of finishing the film. However, a phone call with writer, Aurora Levins Morales changed all that. Aurora connected Susan with Basil Shadid of Dual Power Productions and two years later...

2013

Homesick completed and released September 2013.

Following Up:

As it turns out, the delay of completing the film has offered Susan unique opportunity to do follow-ups of the people Susan originally interviewed in 1997. How they are managing now? Where are they living? Has their health improved in a cleaner, nontoxic environment? You can find this information now on the Homesick website:

<http://homesick-video.com/cast/>

Unfortunately, nothing much has changed for people with MCS since 1997, which makes the film completely current even though it was shot 16 years ago.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Susan Abod is an award-winning filmmaker, professional singer, songwriter, and recording artist.

Her first film, *Funny You Don't Look Sick: An Autobiography of an Illness* (64 min), is an intimate portrait of her life after developing chronic fatigue syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivities in 1986. It premiered at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1995 and was a Merit Award winner at the 2005 SUPERFEST International Disability Film Festival. It has been screened internationally and can be found in doctor's and lawyer's offices, university and public libraries, medical classrooms, centers for independent living, support groups and in peoples' homes all over the world.

Despite living with chronic illness, Susan released her first CD "In the Moment" in 2001. The 16-song CD of mainly original material, encompasses jazz, blues, and pop styles. The Boston Globe described the lyrics as "infused with an intimacy and zest for living".

Since moving to Santa Fe in 2005, Susan has continued to write songs and perform professionally as her health allows. She was described as one of Santa Fe's "hidden gems" by the Santa Fe Reporter magazine and was a featured singer in the 2009 and 2011 New Mexico Jazz Women Voices series in Albuquerque. In 2009, Susan also composed and released a 2-song CD, "Under Santa Fe Skies."

SUSAN ABOD FILMOGRAPHY

Funny, You Don't Look Sick (1995)

CREW

Susan Abod (Director & Producer, Composer, Narrator)

Susan Abod (Director, Writer, Narrator) is an award-winning filmmaker, professional singer, songwriter, and recording artist. Her first film, *Funny You Don't Look Sick: An Autobiography of an Illness* (64 min), is an intimate portrait of her life after developing chronic fatigue syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivities in 1986. It premiered at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1995. Despite her chronic illness, Susan released her first full-length music CD "In the Moment" in 2001. She released an original 2-song CD, 'Under Santa Fe Skies' in 2009 and she composed the songs for *Homesick*. You can learn more about Susan at www.susanabod.com

Basil Shadid (Producer/Editor)

Basil was the Post-Coordinator on the Academy Award nominated documentary *Iraq In Fragments*. He has been working in film since 2003. Based in Seattle, Washington, Basil works internationally. Previous projects have taken him through Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and South America. He has also traveled thousands of miles on freight trains throughout the US. His Masters in Mental Health Counseling, background in popular education, yearning for adventure, and years of experience in production give him a unique perspective on story.

Laurel Greenberg (Camera)

Laurel has 13 years of experience as a videographer and audio engineer for broadcast television (Fox-TV, NY), corporate television (Nynex, John Hancock, Digital) and produced the documentaries *Ninety-Four Years and One Nursing Home Later*, *Nantucket: Portrait of an Island* and *Something Missing*, an award winning music video. For more information, visit <http://www.94years.com>

Alex Perrault (Editor)

Alex Perrault is an Emmy-nominated editor who has worked in film, TV, and web for more than 15 years. His clients include National Geographic, Discovery, PBS, A&E, TLC, Food Network, Animal Planet, Microsoft, and the Gates Foundation. His work was nominated for a Golden Needle at the 2005 Seattle International Film Festival, and has shown at Hot Docs, Newport Beach Film Festival, Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival amongst others. He has also lectured on film and television at the University of Washington, American University, 911 Media Arts Center, and the Hazel Wolf Environmental Film Festival.

Ann McCampbell (MCS Consultant, Writer)

Ann McCampbell, MD has been a leading MCS advocate for over 20 years. She is Chair of the MCS Task Force of NM and a founding board member of the Chemical Sensitivity Foundation (www.chemicalsensitivityfoundation.org). She is the author of a popular introductory booklet on MCS and helped create an "Indoor Environmental Quality Project Report" for the U.S. Access Board. This report makes recommendations for increasing accessibility to public buildings for

people with chemical and electromagnetic sensitivities (www.access-board.gov/research/ieq). Dr. McCampbell worked in the field of women's health until she developed MCS in 1989. She currently lives in Santa Fe, NM and works as an environmental health and chemical sensitivity consultant.

FULL CREDITS

http://www.dualpowerproductions.com/Homesick_Credits.pdf

TECHNICAL NOTES

Homesick was filmed in 1995 on a Hi-8 camera.

Various edits were completed throughout the years.

The final project was edited by Alex Perrault, using Final Cut Pro software running on Apple Macintosh computers. The audio was mixed by Will Cone in Seattle, Washington. Homesick was produced by Dual Power Productions.

Dual Power is an entertainment company in Seattle, Washington. We produce media that promotes understanding, critical thinking, personal development and social change. Our work can be serious, fun, thought provoking, educational or absurd. We use a multi-faceted transmedia approach to getting the message out.

What's the message? In the words of Alice Walker, "Surely the earth can be saved by all the people who insist on love." In the words of Utah Phillips, "You've got to mess with people!"

Dual Power Productions is run by Basil Shadid, billie rain, and Alix Kolar. Our artist core consists of several filmmakers, authors, and other artists.

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