

“Poisoning My Dream”



We know that Americans home is simply the place the time: during our first or as we get settled-in for

But, some choose their for their personal dream. revolves around the land piece of land looks, what it you feel .

Carol Ashley chose where she would live. It was a bit of rural land in northern Minnesota. It was her present and it would be her future. It was also her fulfillment. One day, she learned a neighbor would be permitted to poison that dream.

In a way, my story starts in 1990 when I moved to the middle of fifteen acres, partly to be away from other people's chemicals. It was a piece of land where I had gardened since 1975; where I dreamed of having a home. My home was a fulfillment of a childhood dream in what it offered, a beautiful meadow surrounded by forest. It was also close to the support systems that I needed. It has an abundance of wild food which I shared with the wildlife that abounded.

In the middle of the 90's, I started having problems with pesticide drift from neighboring fields. At first they used Bravo, a brand name of chlorothalonil, when potatoes were in a two year rotation. I suffered from extremely painful bloating. I learned quickly to head for the house and close all the windows when I heard a plane or helicopter coming. One of those early years, in a particularly rainy summer, they sprayed almost every other day.

Later, they went to a three year rotation but even in off years when beans or corn were planted, I could get hit unexpectedly from drift, often in the evenings when I had a fan on pulling in cooler air. Sometimes I would be laid up for three days, barely able to move. Other times it affected my nervous system causing slurred speech. Another time, I lost vision temporarily in one eye while driving past a field.

One time I realized my mother had been out picking raspberries on a day I had significant drift. I called my mother to tell her not to eat the raspberries. The very next day she had pneumonia...not from eating the raspberries, I presume, but from breathing the air. It was the only time she ever had pneumonia suddenly and in the summertime.

My dogs also began to get sick whenever the spray drift happened. Once, when the closest field was fumigated, I became severely nauseated and dizzy. Even my dogs started weaving and vomiting. One time, I saw frogs disappear the day after drift. Another time, I saw a multitude of dead birds along a road between two fields. Bees had disappeared very early on.

tend to move. Quite often where we are located at job; while going to school; the kids.

home as the foundation And often that choice itself. It's about how a can do, and how it makes

One fall, my well had a chemical off-taste. I hauled water for drinking and cooking until the off taste disappeared. I had no way of finding out what was in my water due to the cost as well as not having the right to know what chemicals were being applied.

Several people, along with me, were hit by a particularly bad batch in August of 2010 that had a high degree of particulate matter and probably a contaminant found in chlorothalonil, hexachlorobenzene, a neurotoxin. After that, I had difficulty breathing in the presence of chlorothalonil. Another neighbor and a mutual friend and I also experienced slurred speech immediately afterwards plus a metallic taste in our mouths that lasted about three days.

Through the years that I was dealing with pesticide drift, I first called RDO to find out what they were spraying. Eventually they stopped taking calls. I began addressing the pesticide issue with a group in central Minnesota, which became Minnesotans for Pesticide Awareness (MNPA). Then I started calling the Department of Agriculture. The only time I seemed to get a reaction was when I was talking with the regional director and told him about my well being contaminated.

During those years I went with MNPA to hearings at the Capitol and a hearing with the Assistant Agriculture Commissioner. I participated in drift catching to determine how much chlorothalonil was in the air. I contacted our County Attorney who said he couldn't do anything. I spoke about the issue at a County Commissioners meeting when the particulate matter was especially high one year. Eventually I joined Toxic Taters which combined individuals and groups to keep addressing the issue. I talked with many people in the broad area who were dealing with pesticide drift.

Every time I saw a doctor and the intake nurse asked me if I felt safe in my home, I said "no" and told them about pesticide drift. They eventually quit asking me that question. I saw a toxicologist who said that chlorothalonil was very hard on the respiratory system and I needed to work with the MDA to address the issue. I also wrote a letter to the Agriculture Commissioner who put it on the regional director's desk and said "do something." They said they couldn't do anything.

So, I began plans to move.

My parents were 95 and 90 years old. They lived close by and I had been their major caretaker. After 2 1/2 years of searching, I finally found a place I could move to. I had almost paid off my mortgage but lost about \$20,000 in equity by moving. I also lost my work which was raising and selling perennial plants. It was not easy on my parents to have me farther away and it took more effort on my part to continue managing their care for the next two and a half years.

On the other hand, the day after I moved, I could again breathe freely and easily and soon discovered that I could also again walk up and down steps without struggling.

By Carol Ashley