

Vacation with Fragrances – A Horror Story

by Gudrun Rauer Nielsen, spouse of someone with MCS

We had a great vacation on the Azores (a group of islands off the coast of Portugal), but we almost didn't make it home again. . . .

My husband, who has MCS, and I, were on vacation with two other couples, when we were picked up at the hotel by two taxis.

We chose to have one taxi for the women and one for the men, when I thought one of the ladies had some perfume on her. We arrived at the airport ten minutes later. My husband staggered out of his taxi and over to a bench to lay down, while fighting for his breath. It had turned out that both taxis had automatic fragrance dispensers, which every ten seconds pumped out a whiff of perfume.

A man from the airport first-aid station came to help. He gave my husband oxygen with the help of three other people, and it was needed as he was losing all sensation in his arms and legs. They put him in a wheelchair, so we could move him around. He began to feel a little better, but the pilot refused to allow him on board without a fit-for-flight clearance by a doctor.

Our plane left, but we would be able to get back to Denmark on another flight a few hours later. An ambulance took us to a hospital where my husband was taken to the emergency room, while I took care of the paperwork.

A while later, I was called in to see him. The emergency room stunk of disinfectants, medicines, perfume and cleaning agents. Here my husband sat with a doctor, who was holding him back. He wanted to get out, as he could not breathe with all those odors. I quickly rolled him out of the emergency room, out through the double doors, which were kicked open by his legs and the wheelchair. Out past the smokers at the entrance and the idling vehicles, out to fresh air.

It was like an action movie. The doctor and an orderly ran behind us. I had to sign papers that I refused medical treatment and thus was responsible for him. Then he sat and tried to breathe. We couldn't get back to the airport, as there were no safe taxis. The ambulance returned, but they were not allowed to take us back. Fortunately, the ambulance people were able to find a fragrance-free taxi. But when we got back to the airport, the next pilot would not allow us on board either, which was reasonable enough.

We were offered an extra night at the hotel. It was really easier and cheaper to

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extend the visit for an extra week, but we both had jobs we needed to get back for.

With no further fragrance incidents, my husband recovered fine and back at the hotel a doctor from the travel agency issued a fit-for-flight clearance.

The trip home included a stop-over for a night, but we got home without further incidents. I have now learned to sniff out taxis and hotel rooms before letting my husband enter.

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