

Loe's story: remote living in the desert



A school teacher gets severe environmental illness and has to flee to a remote part of the Arizona desert.

Keywords: multiple chemical sensitivities, electrical hypersensitivity, environmental illness, story, housing

Loe G. was a school teacher when she got sick with multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) in the 1980s. She struggled along, but when she also got electrical hypersensitivity (EHS) in 2003 she had to go on disability.

Unable to find housing she could afford and tolerate, she had to live in her car. Looking for something better, she traveled to the Southwest.

She found a remote valley where Arizona and New Mexico meet, just north of the border with Mexico. It was far from any industry, mining or agriculture. Cellular phones didn't even work there. Here a handful of other people with the illness had built their own houses to live in safety.



Loe's Arizona camp in 2005.

The nearest towns were Rodeo, New Mexico, and Portal, Arizona.

A local charity offered Loe that she could live on some land they owned on the side of the Chiricahua mountains. It was several miles down a terrible dirt road, there was no well, no electricity, no toilet and no telephone. The only thing there was the ruin of a tiny stone hut where the door, windows and roof were long gone. The floor was sand.

Loe moved there and lived in a tent. Water had to be hauled in. Her kitchen was built of tarps. A gas refrigerator stored her food.

The local community helped her out, especially a friendly neighbor. The hut was renovated over a couple of years, so she could live indoors. It was just a small room with stone walls and no insulation. There was no heating or cooling, but the phone company put in a landline.

A flushing toilet was even installed in the corner of the room.

Later on, the stone hut was wrapped in insulating blankets on the outside, and awnings were put up to shade the desert sun. Non-electric heating was installed,

with an outdoor propane heater and a radiator inside. It wasn't cozy in the winter, but it was a major improvement.



Outdoor propane water heater to heat the cabin, which by then also had sun shades and some insulation (2015)

After several years of peace, people moved in on the adjacent lot and started to develop it. They put in a solar well, inverters, and who knows what else. The radiation eventually forced Loe to leave.

She was able to rent a house near Dolan Springs where there was another EI community. The house was on a twenty-acre lot with a great view to Mount Mitten. On the adjacent lot was someone else with environmental illness, who lived in a camper. There was a regular household across the street. On the two

other sides there was empty land for a mile or more. Loe lived here until death in 2021.

Notes

The picture at the start is Loe sitting in her stone cabin in 2007.

All pictures are by the author, who visited Loe at her Chiricahua place in 2005, 2007 and 2015.

More stories

More stories about people with environmental illness on www.eiwellspring.org/facesandstories.html