

This book is about people who are forced to be refugees in their own country after they become hypersensitive to electricity or/and microwave radiation from wireless technologies.

I am not affected by this condition, nor is anyone in my family. After I realized the health hazards caused by cell phones and other wireless communication gadgets, I started writing about it. That's how I met a number of people who had become electrohypersensitive (EHS). This condition has disabled some of them to such an extent that they were forced to flee from their homes and workplaces to find refuge in forested areas as far away from electrical power and cell phone towers as possible.

This knowledge had a major impact on me. The fact is that some of my fellow citizens are forced to live as refugees in their own country! They are not fleeing from wars or terrorism, but from modern technology. Refugees, nonetheless, in one of the most safe and advanced countries in the world, or what once was a safe country - before the introduction of the latest in information technology and wireless communications systems.

These people want and need to have their stories told - for their own sake because of the obvious injustice, and because this is everybody's business. Their stories are our story. People with EHS are no different from you or me. The only thing that separates them from us is simply luck.

I have travelled around the country and met many EHS refugees, and have interviewed about twenty people of the over 600 identified by The Swedish Association for the ElectroSensitive¹. They told me their stories. Certain themes emerged and I've divided them into chapters.

Some EHS refugees wanted to remain anonymous, while others did not mind going public. "I believe everyone is responsible. That's why I want to tell my story," one person said. However, I have decided to give them all fictitious names as not to spotlight the individual, but to emphasize that they can be anyone of us.

- ❖ THANK YOU to all my new friends, with their assumed names - *Maria, Siv, Björn, Klas, Mia, Eva, Thomas, Inger, Birgit, Naser, Elisabeth, Kenneth, Johanna's dad, and Jonas' mom.*
- ❖ THANK YOU for sharing your many painful experiences so willingly and sincerely.
- ❖ THANK YOU for your endurance.
- ❖ THANK YOU for putting your trust in me; I hope this book reflects my gratitude.

Gunilla Ladberg

¹ a.k.a FEB

CHAPTER 1 *Inger*: In 3 days my life changed forever

— I've had EHS for 4 ½ years, but it took only 3 days for my life to change forever! It happened in June 2002, when I had just bought a new computer. My husband was away on a school trip with his students, and our daughter had just left home. The summer nights were wonderful, and I spent them in front of the computer designing programs.

Right from the start I suffered from foggy vision. It was quite warm so I thought I was dehydrated. I kept drinking water, but it didn't help. The following evening I felt dizzy and had a prickling sensation in my face. So I drank a glass of wine, thinking that's what I really needed! The third evening I fainted in front of the computer. I didn't understand why. Instead I sat down in front of the television, and that's when my whole body reacted with a prickling skin sensation, dizziness and double vision. The next morning I couldn't handle standing close to the fridge, the freezer or the stove.

Lengthy conversations on a cordless phone

— I worked part-time at a drugstore and had used a computer since the 1980s. It took me quite some time before I bought a cell phone. Instead I used a digital cordless phone at home. I was politically involved and spent a lot of time on the phone.

When all of this was happening to me, I called someone I know to find out how EHS symptoms started. She told me about the prickling sensation in the face. I broke down and spent three days crying in the hammock. I knew I was in for a tough time.

What should I do? I couldn't live at home any more, so I borrowed a camping trailer and lived in it for a while. When fall arrived, I had to turn on the heat to keep the chill out. This resulted in me crawling out of the trailer on all fours. I couldn't handle the electromagnetic fields from the heater's battery.

After some time, I managed to find a cabin in the forest near the border of Dalarna County. It had no running water, central heating or a toilet. The fireplace was my only convenience, and it did not spread much heat. I lived alone. My husband came by at times with clean clothes, water, propane and food. I had no heat until October/November when it got really cold. At that time, we managed to find another cabin, also without running water but with a wood stove. I lived there through the winter. Three weeks in a row the temperature dropped below -25 degrees Celsius. Inside it hovered around zero. I slept in layers, and layers, and layers of clothes. I scraped ice off the floor and my dog's water bowl. I had my suitcase packed with clean underwear, and when I unpacked them there were icicles dangling from the fabric. That was my life. I had no choice really.

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I lived behind a tree stump

— One morning I woke up and felt unusually sick. A friend of mine came by and picked me up. She said to me, “Your face is the same colour as your white sofa!”

She drove me back to my house. I felt completely exhausted, and I don’t remember much of that trip. However, I figured that the background radiation must have suddenly increased. Later on, I found out that a couple of new transmission towers had been activated in the area, as well as a new wireless tracking system for truck drivers.

There was no safe place for me anywhere. I found a fallen tree stump in the forest and I settled there for a while. It was the middle of winter. I only slept there. During the days I kept wandering about. It was a matter of survival.

Finally my husband and I bought a small construction trailer. It was such a relief. We put it close by our house, and this made it much easier to get food. I had no heating, so I bought a propane heater but could only use it in the daytime.

Throughout this time period, I had a nonstop letter exchange with the municipality. After many trips back and forth I was finally allowed financial help to mitigate the electromagnetic fields in our house. I received SEK 50,000² but had to add SEK 70,000³ of my own money. In December 2003, I was able to move back into the house. But after a month I became sick again. Why? A new transmission tower had been activated about three kilometers from home. I had to leave again!

I have no home

— I finally ended up in this place, a building I share with a few other people who also suffer from EHS. It was terribly substandard, with only a dirt floor, no indoor toilet and no central heating. Over the years, we’ve managed to make some improvements. The ambient radiation in this area is not low enough for me, but it’s hard to find such a place in this country for people as debilitated as we are.

I never brought any of my personal belongings to the places I moved to, including this one. Instead I borrowed or was given things. I always lived with the hope of moving back home again. That hope has died completely by now.

Recently, I brought some of my own things to this place, for example my kitchen table. I’ll never forget how I felt when I saw it here for the first time. I sat down and cried. This is *my* table, *my* scratches... I went back home for more. But home? No, I don’t have a real home anymore.

² @ 7,350 USD

³ @ 10,300 USD

Divorce

As time went on, my marriage of 32 years finally ended in divorce. My husband could not handle being with me any longer. He had handled all my practical needs, like shopping, the water supply, laundry, and newspapers. He was amazing when it came to helping out, or thoughtful enough to bring me an extra chocolate bar, when I hadn't asked for one. But he never lived with me during this time. My weekends were spent in solitude.

During the summer of 2005, I suggested several things we could do together, like hiking in the mountains, canoe trips, or getting involved in the popular trend of mapping old rural homesteads. But he always said "no" to my suggestions. Finally I brought up our relationship with him.

It was a short discussion. I asked him: - How do you really feel? What should we do? How about buying a house in a forested area where both of us can live?" He answered, "I don't know what to say. I just know that I really can't live like you have to live, without television, without radio and everything else". So I said: "We may as well let go and live our own separate lives, then?" Yes, he thought so. I asked him if he felt we should we go as far as filing for divorce. That's when he revealed his true feelings. "YES!" he said. "Well, it will cost us SEK 450⁴." "I'll pay!" he said. In those ten minutes our 32 years together completely disintegrated.

My daughter's reserve

— Our daughter has been very angry and disappointed about our divorce. She distanced herself from me for a while, basically because she was scared. It's better now, and I have a wonderful grandchild who now visits me regularly. We spend a lot of time together here.

I spent Christmas Eve with them at their home for three hours. We had dinner and opened presents. All I kept thinking was "As long as I don't faint or throw up, this will all work out."

The book bus

— Sometimes nice things happen too. I've managed to arrange a few things for us here. With my political experience, I know how to get things done. Now we are able to use the disability transit service and get medical home care whenever we need it. I have also arranged for the book bus to stop at our place. This is our only cultural event, since the town library is not accessible for us. When we arrive, the driver immediately

⁴ @ 65 USD

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turns off the motor, the computer, the fluorescent lights and his cell phone. We leave the bus while he registers the books on the computer.

"This is your life"

— Two years ago I was quite depressed because of all this. I suddenly realized that this is my life! Nothing will change. I'm too debilitated.

National and international news doesn't always reach me. Sometimes it gets a bit peculiar, like yesterday. A friend of mine called from Bangkok. She said, "I just wanted to let you know that I'm still alive." - Why wouldn't you be alive? I asked her. "There's a lot of gunfire around here," was her reply. I had no idea that there had been terrorist attacks in Bangkok. It's really hard to keep up with the news. Newspapers are expensive. Suffering from EHS is a financial disaster. We can't take anything for granted. On the other hand, a very small change can be a huge improvement. Soon I'll be getting a propane lamp, so I don't have to be dependent on candles anymore. A major improvement!

I want to be around when people finally get it!

— This is not real life. Since it is becoming more difficult to live here too. I'm constantly thinking, "I can't move one more time". I don't have the energy to do it. The ambient radiation around here has increased a lot recently. Over the last few years my health improved. No more vomiting and fainting. Other symptoms subsided too. Now my health is declining again.

Yesterday something happened to me that I've never experienced before. I went down to visit *Klas* for ten minutes to check out a few things on his computer. Then my eyes suddenly were turning inwards, like being cross-eyed, although it was more severe. I had to cover one eye to be able to see with the other eye. It took a couple of minutes before it all cleared up. I was terrified.

Everything here centres on the most basic things in life, like having a roof over our heads and not being cold. Feeling like an outsider is very painful, not being taken seriously, and not knowing what is happening to us. From having been politically active with a busy schedule, life came to a complete halt in three days.

Thoughts of suicide are my constant companion. Not a day goes by without my thinking about how to end it all. But today I'll get a new lamp! And my granddaughter will be visiting soon. These simple things keep me going for now. I want to write and tell our story. I am determined to be around when others finally get it! When we are able to say, "We told you so! Why didn't you listen to us?!"

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CHAPTER 2 The impossible escape

Most of the EHS refugees I interviewed have had to relocate multiple times. This is not the same as when you or I decide to move. This is literally about escape. "I've had to flee from electricity and microwaves to simply survive. I didn't have a choice really. It's the survival instinct, plain and simple," *Maria* says.

Eva's and Thomas' flight

Eva suffers from EHS. *Thomas* is her husband and is therefore indirectly affected. Both by being forced to live such a restricted lifestyle, and by his painstaking to make each new refuge as livable as possible for *Eva*. When I ask *Thomas* to tell his story he replies: "My story is parallel to *Eva's*, and it has been for over thirty years."

Two years in the basement

Eva: — We used to live in Järna. But I became increasingly more sensitive to electricity, until I couldn't cope with it any longer. There was no point in trying to mitigate the house we lived in because the magnetic fields were too strong. I felt a bit better in the basement, and I lived down there for two years with only two peepholes for windows. Finally, we just had to leave. We found a cabin on the outskirts of the town Södertälje. *Thomas* renovated and insulated it, added a garage and a guest cottage. We only had one neighbour when we moved there. By the time we moved away, 13-14 residents lived there year round with their televisions and their security alarms and so on. And then the expansion of wireless communication systems began. A cluster of transmission towers sprang up on the other side of the lake. Life got a lot worse. I felt vibrations in my whole body. It became unbearable. I couldn't sleep at night. Instead I would stagger around in the woods with our dog.

Thomas: — We had to flee from that area too. We spent every waking hour looking for another home. We bought a camping trailer and placed it in a safe location for *Eva*. Then we sold our house by the lake we moved to Björnlunda, where we had found a nice house. Once again I mitigated the electromagnetic fields in our new home.

Complete collapse

Eva: — I felt good there. I went for walks without getting tired. It was so wonderful. The hellish headaches had stopped and I slept well. I slept a lot actually. Then the new wireless utility meters were introduced. I completely collapsed again. We managed to keep our old electrical meter, but our neighbour's new meter was hooked to the same utility pole and as a result our mitigation efforts were ruined. We were also able to measure this interference.

The utility company was not very amenable, to say the least. But we are getting used to that - being treated like lesser than others.

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We bought an electrical filter which cost us SEK 16,000⁵. It wasn't great, but it was enough to help me carry on. After a while, something else happened, which made it impossible to spend any time outdoors. Wimax, the new wireless broadband system had started up. I kept staggering around and had a real hard time breathing.

We finally ended up in this cottage after trying it out during our holidays. It felt like a dream come true just being here. We returned to Björnlunda, *Thomas* quit his job, we sold our house and moved to this cottage instead. Now we survive on my disability pension.

We hardly use any electricity now, and the kitchen lamp has a shielded cable. We have an outhouse, and when it's cold outside, the indoor temperature is as low as +11 degrees Celsius. This is a picturesque place, but now we are getting to the age we need more conveniences. It is not by choice anyone would leave a warm and well-built house for a cottage with an outhouse.

Elisabeth's escape

Elisabeth became sick when she changed careers and started using a computer.

— I attended a graphic design program and worked on a computer every day. It was so much fun! This was my chosen career. After I finished my training, I worked as an apprentice, but after three weeks I was a wreck. I felt dizzy and had heart trouble, headaches, skin and eye irritations, and could hardly concentrate on my work.

Gradually, Elisabeth's health declined considerably.

— In January 2005, the new wireless utility meters were installed, apparently the worst model. My symptoms became severe. I contacted the utility company, and they were quite amenable at first, and came to install an electrical filter on the utility meter. But it didn't help. My testing equipment did not register any improvements either. When I reported back to the utility company their attitude suddenly changed. I wrote several letters, first to middle-management and then to senior management. Their reply was that they had done enough. It was not their responsibility to fix it.

Forced to flee again

— During this time I was unable to sleep in my own place. I slept at friends', one night here, one night there. That was not a solution either. It's hard to find low radiation places for us suffering from EHS. After some time, I cleaned out my camping trailer and started living there instead. It was OK – for a while. I spent the days outdoors as much as possible, and kept the electricity turned off most of the time when I was inside. Just the same, I became much worse during the spring. I went away for a week and recuperated quite well. But when I returned home, I became just as sick again.

⁵ @ 2,300 USD

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I felt I just had to get away, far, far away. But where would I go? I happened to notice a classified ad in *Ljusglimten*, the FEB magazine,⁶ about a place in the village Grangärde in Dalarna county. My partner drove me there.

That's where I met Erika. She suffered from severe EHS. Erika understood me; she knew what it was like. I couldn't sleep. I was so sick, and *so scared*, so terribly frightened. "Am I supposed to feel like this for the rest of my life??" It was devastating not to understand what was happening to my body. Erika said to me, "You can do whatever you want. You can scream, cry, fight or whatever you want. But *not give up!*"

I cried and kicked the trees

— During my two month visit outside of Grangärde, I started to feel better. The old farm nestled in the hills, and I stayed in my trailer away from the main buildings. In the beginning, I hardly slept at all, only an hour or so a night. My body was completely out of balance. I lay sleepless night after night and felt very distressed. I went for long hikes in the forest and yelled, cried, and kicked the tree trunks. Every day I thought, "How am I going to manage?" Gradually my body started to feel better, and when I left Grangärde after two months I felt recuperated.

At that time some friends of mine had found a cabin for me outside of Sala. They brought EMF testing equipment, measured the location and reported that it was livable. I went there to try it out. The cabin was quaint and situated at the edge of the forest. I spent one restless night there. In the morning my throat and lungs felt so sore. I could hardly breathe and had to leave.

I carried my stuff back to my camping trailer and stayed there instead. A new problem. Where could I go? I was all alone in the woods without a telephone and was barely able to drive. When the owners of the cabin found out that I was not going to buy it, they told me that I had to leave with my trailer in two days. Panic!

That's when the moving circus started in earnest. My son and some EHS friends helped me out by moving the trailer several times. I tried living on properties of various friends and friends of friends, but I felt more or less sick in all those places. One month, I parked my trailer with some EHS friends. It was really nice there. Staying so much closer to my old home, I had more visits too. Unfortunately, I was unable to tolerate the ambient radiation there either. I felt desperate. Once again I was unable to have a home turf.

Alone on a deserted campground

— Earlier that year I had checked out a campground, and this became my next refuge - my fifth move in 2 ½ months.

That's how I ended up all alone on a deserted campground in the November darkness. Friends and acquaintances tried to help me look for a decent place to live, but all leads ended up nowhere. I sat in my trailer and all I could do was write letters. I felt so helpless.

⁶ Quarterly magazine published by Swedish Association for the ElectroSensitive (FEB).

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Lots of problems started piling up. Where would I move in the spring? I knew I could not remain on the campground, when people started to show up with their cell phones and all their electronic stuff. How would I cope financially? I had been told that my sick leave had expired. Would I qualify for any extended benefits? How much? Finding an apartment in a low radiation area seemed impossible, but how would I be able to afford a cabin outside town? The relationship with my partner was becoming more strained.

I felt so worn down when I arrived at the campground. The constant moving in and out of bad locations had taken its toll.

Elisabeth was forced to flee a few more times before she ended up in her present home. Not an ideal situation but somewhat better than before, she says. She has now separated from her partner.

The drastic escape

You may be forced to leave your home abruptly, never to return.

Björn: — On June 1, 2003 at 3 am I woke up suddenly for the last time in our old house. My heart was racing, my skin was burning. I had unbearable pains in my tongue, and a thirst that could not be quenched. The symptoms got worse with every passing minute. "Damn, it must be the electrical fences!" We ran to the car for a quick escape.

It turned out that our neighbour had switched on the electrical fences at midnight for the first time that season without warning us first. Over the years, we had been entrusted with the responsibility of turning the electrical fences off when we were at home, and turning them back on when we left. As it turned out, the owner, a nurse, was tired of paying attention to sick people during her off time too. She wanted the fences to be on around the clock, even though she said she did not doubt that we had EHS.

Fortunately, we managed to borrow a camping trailer (with no insulation) for a short time. Living in our Volkswagen was a bit cramped to say the least.

Live-in trial

I had never heard the expression 'live-in trial' before I met the EHS refugees. They often test a new location by staying there for a short while to find out if their bodies tolerate the ambient radiation at that particular location, which may vary drastically. A tolerable location the first day, may become intolerable after a week. That's why it is important to do a 'live-in trial' – we create the words that we need.

Kenneth: — Live-in trials are important to me. That's how I find out if I'll be able to rent or buy a place. I have moved about 25-30 times. I have slept in cars and tents. Now I own a camping trailer too.

For the average person, it is enough to just check out a new place before deciding whether or not to move there. A live-in trial is hardly thought before buying a house or renting an apartment, and certainly would be a puzzling request for a real estate agent to hear.

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Nearly all the people I interviewed resorted to live-in trials, but sometimes that's not possible. They take a chance instead, only to discover another impossible location.

And tomorrow?

The ambient electromagnetic radiation at any location is seldom consistent but the concentration varies. What we can expect, however, is that the overall radiation will increase in most places. We use wireless networks, wireless internet and electronics at home. Cars and stores are similarly equipped. Soon there may be no free zone anywhere.

Björn: — When the owners of the cabin next door show up on weekends or holidays with their cell phones we have to leave immediately. "If you can't handle our cell phones, you may as well leave when we arrive," they said. "Could you please call us before you arrive then?" we asked. They don't want to. That's why we always have to be ready to leave. And we never know how long we have to stay away from our home either.

Mia: — I never feel settled, because I just never know about anything. Will I be able to stay here? The overall radiation is a lot worse today, compared to when I first moved here. Do I have the right to have access to my own home? Some politicians talk about hospital accessibility and so on. The home environment is even more important. We are not being treated like human beings. We don't exist. We are not allowed to exist.

We are constantly chased by wireless technology. It feels like we are being persecuted all the time.

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CHAPTER 3 *Klas*: Yes, it's a beautiful prison

As we walk down towards *Klas*' small cottage, I remark on the beautiful setting by the lake. "Yes," *Klas* replies. "It's a beautiful prison, but a prison just the same."

Klas is able to use some electronic devices that other EHS refugees cannot. He has built his own studio, where his equipment is protected from harmful electrical and magnetic fields with the latest in shielding know-how. This set-up makes it possible for him to work in the studio, as long as the overall radiation in the environment remains stable.

— I used to work in advertising. I also compose music, and right now I'm in the midst of writing a musical. Back in 1996, I used a cell phone as my answering service at work. I always carried the phone in my back pocket. One day, I noticed a big red spot on my buttock when I came home. That's when I realized that there might be something weird happening with this new technology. I have not used a cell phone since then. I started using a pager instead.

Uncontrollable perspiration and listlessness

— Before 1999, life was fairly uneventful. Then I got a job as a Web designer and a multimedia producer. When I started at my new workplace, my whole body went out of balance. My feet started perspiring uncontrollably, to the point that tears came in my eyes. I had to wash my feet five times a day. It turned out that my work area was 80 centimeters from a DECT⁷ panel, and I was also surrounded by three computer screens.

I started having problems concentrating and I became listless. I had to make to-do lists and tick them off to get anything done at all. Otherwise I just ended up staring out the window all day. It was so frustrating. I lost all pride in my work. I simply couldn't manage to edit texts any longer. I kept losing my train of thought. When I went in to see my boss for the third time, and he pointed out that the same mistakes were still there...I just wanted to cry.

I stopped sleeping

— Fortunately I was laid off when the dot.com industry crashed in 2002. I focused on my health instead and started exercising, eating a balanced diet and abstaining from alcohol. All of a sudden, in November 2003, I stopped sleeping. This lasted for 5 ½ months. I lay awake, and dozed off maybe for an hour or so each night. It was very debilitating.

⁷ DECT=Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications, or Digital European Cordless Telecommunications

After this time I began checking out my surroundings a bit closer. That's when I happened to look up at the rooftops, and wondered: "What's been put up there?" I had no idea of what it was, so I started doing research on the Internet and discovered: "Oh my god, we've been introduced to a new technology!" I realized that I lived 250 meters from a relay antenna, and that another antenna was located 110 meters from where I worked. I wondered if my sleeplessness had something to do with this. So I started researching. I got the opportunity to borrow a house in an area with no cell phone coverage for a while, to find out if I would sleep better there. I slept well the first night, and even better the second night.

It's like turning up the volume

— Some time later, I borrowed my parents' car and commuted to Karlstad city centre. As I approached the nearby transmission tower, it felt like someone was cranking up the volume. The tension in all of my muscles increased. I started experimenting by walking towards a few cell towers to find out what would happen. I wanted to figure out what was physical and what was psychological. Every time I was about 50 meters from the towers I started to tremble, my heart started beating irregularly, I was nauseous, my muscles felt weak and I began seeing double. It became quite obvious what was happening to me.

I got in touch with the cell phone operator, only to receive rude letters from the company lawyer, basically telling me to see a psychiatrist. Finally, I realized that I had to do something radical. I talked to people who knew more about this condition. I also constructed a so-called Faraday cage⁸ from metal mosquito netting. This cage helped somewhat, but it wasn't enough. One night I felt I had two choices - either remain in the cage all the time or flee from the city. I found an old cabin for a live-in trial, but that location didn't work for me. I was too debilitated already. Finally I found this place, and as I sat down in the kitchen I realized: "Klas, you'll never be able to move back to Karlstad. You'll never use public transit again. And the studio you built will never be used."

My studio had cost SEK 400,000⁹ and taken me four years to build. It took two days to tear it down, load the truck and haul it away.

But it's the CELL TOWERS!

— When I moved to this place I didn't know what EHS actually meant. The next big shock came one day when I was cooking. I suddenly couldn't handle standing by the stove. "What is this!?" I thought. "It's cell towers I can't handle!" Later, when I used my MP3 player, it took only about 10 minutes before I started feeling nauseous.

After being at this place for a while, I started feeling like a human being again. But that also varies with the density of the wireless smog. Some days I notice by my

⁸ A Faraday cage diverts electromagnetic radiation. It basically functions like a lightning rod.
⁹@ 57,000 USD

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neighbours' body language when the smog clears. They stand up straight and start doing things again.

If the overall radiation were lower here, I would be able to work and compose music all the time. I don't sleep soundly; I sleep, but it's fitful.

No future

— I've been on sick leave since I moved here, but this support has just been terminated. The authorities claim that I have fully recovered, and that I'm able to return to work. Right now I'm surviving on borrowed money.

Future? There is none. I drove to some friends once to stay overnight, and brought my Faraday cage with me. But as soon as I went outside, it sort of felt like leaving a submarine underwater. I'm constantly deprived of moving around freely and having fun, of travelling and enjoying a normal social life with my friends.

In conclusion, *Klas* says that his worst experience was "those five months without sleep. Sitting naked on the floor, with splitting headaches, shaking and crying while rubbing my skin with olive oil to ease the stinging was the worst experience I've ever had." He adds, "Even ten million Swedish crowns a month couldn't compensate for my suffering."

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CHAPTER 4 Symptoms: varying, changeable, and getting worse

My EHS friends describe a long list of physical symptoms. Simply speaking, EHS ranges from mild discomfort to unbearable symptoms. At the early stages, mitigation efforts at home can remedy the symptoms. However, when they are more severe, the only known remedy is to live in a location free of electromagnetic pollution.

Eva: — I felt vibrations going through my body. It was unbearable. I couldn't sleep and ended up walking aimlessly at night. I roamed around in the woods with my dog. Most people don't understand what it feels like. It burns and tingles, and that may not sound too serious. But it's so much more, and completely devastating.

Klas said this about his five sleepless months: — My head felt like it was going to burst, and I ended up sitting on the floor quivering and crying while rubbing my skin with olive oil to relieve the stinging pains.

Maria: — I felt dizzy, had a constant headache, tinnitus, muscle pain, joint pain, stomach problems and more. I was totally exhausted; I had such a hard time doing the simplest task. Total fatigue and unrelenting stress symptoms in my body that just wouldn't go away.

Elisabeth describes how it all started: "Dizziness, heart problems, skin and eye problems, headaches, fatigue and a feeling of being completely unfocused."

— I stayed at the campground from October until May. In the spring, I started feeling gradually worse instead of gradually better as you might expect. I even became sensitive to sunlight¹⁰ and had to wear dark sunglasses. I couldn't be outside even with double sun glasses. This was in March with lots of snow and endless sunshine. During my most sensitive time, I could only venture outside before sunrise or after sundown. Even so, I had to wear double sunglasses. I ended up with severe bouts of anxiety. I was confined to the camping trailer for two weeks, until I was able to tolerate daylight again.

Symptoms ease off - and return

Klas and **Elisabeth** told me that their symptoms eased off sometimes, unexpectedly and inexplicably, only to return later. The variable intensity of the wireless pollution makes it difficult to plan the day, or the following day. Or even the next hour. A regular life is not attainable. This is very draining psychologically.

Mia: — When I look back at my life I realize that I haven't really been able to tolerate electricity for a long time. For as long back as I can remember, my eyes became red and itchy when I watched television. I grew up in the country. As a teenager I went to the city to shop and so on. I knew I was reacting to something there. Was it the fluorescent lighting? I felt sick, especially in the subway.

¹⁰ Sun light is like electricity, a form of electromagnetic radiation.

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

Today Mia lives like a refugee in the woods, in a cabin with no electricity.

— My symptoms are fatigue, irritability, dizziness and numbness in my face, jaws, hands and arms. I feel pressure in my chest and find it hard to breathe. I get heart pains and shortness of breath when I talk. I also get unfocused and scatterbrained; I just can't seem to focus. I get tinnitus, earaches, headaches, a feeling of heavy pressure on my head, stress and anxiety.

It just can't be this bad!

When I hear *Mia* and the others tell me about how they suffer, I become aware of my own reactions. I don't want to hear any more. "That's enough! Not another symptom. It can't be this bad!"

Afterwards, when I settle down at home to go over the interviews, the same thoughts come up: "Why did I take on this job!? I don't suffer from EHS!" That's when it hits me. Maybe that's why many of the refugees have told me about families and friends, who desert them by refusing to accept what they hear. "No, it can't be this bad!" And so they pretend that it doesn't exist...?!

It's not noticeable

I ask *Mia* during our chat how she feels right now. She speaks so calmly and clearly, and I cannot detect any particular symptoms. She looks perfectly fine. She describes it like this: "I feel pressure and pain in my head and my jaw is a bit numb. My tongue is swollen and my hands are numb. I feel dizzy. It is very exhausting to talk to you and keep my thoughts on track at the same time."

Almost all the EHS refugees I've met look healthy. When they tell me how they feel at any particular moment, I find it hard to believe that they are unwell – they just don't look it! Maybe that's another reason why other people don't believe them.

When the brain shuts down

Many of the EHS symptoms show that the brain and the body do not receive the right signals. Electromagnetic fields and microwaves apparently interrupt the body's natural electrical system. Many of the EHS refugees describe this aspect as the worst part of it all.

Björn: — Even the most mundane task becomes difficult. I've done plenty of carpentry in my days, but sometimes when I hold a screw in one hand and a nut in the other, it ends up as an onerous task. Or when I'm about to write a simple note, nothing ends up on the paper. I'm quite a good writer too.

Eva: - What's really scary is that you could call me a little senile. I can't remember things.

Thomas: — I notice immediately when *Eva* reacts to electromagnetic fields or microwaves. One day when we went to the supermarket and later unpacked the food at home, I noticed a lot of unusual items. So I asked her: "Why did you buy these things?" She didn't remember that she had bought them. The anti-theft device by the cash registers and the store entrance affect her too when she counts money.

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

At times she walks around completely confused. Once she was supposed to buy some flowers while I did the grocery shopping. I went around putting stuff in the shopping cart. When I met up with her again she was still looking for the flower display.

Eva: — Sometimes my thoughts get so jumbled. For instance, when I do crossword puzzles I sometimes write down things that don't make any sense at all. What is really happening to my brain?

Siv: — I may be standing with a cup in my hand and ready to drink from it. Suddenly it slips from my grip. But the worst part is what's happening to the brain. All of a sudden I lose my sense of self and my ability to think. It feels as if I'm standing at a precipice. It's like vertigo, and it is horrifying.

What makes me sick?

How are the EHS refugees supposed to know what makes them sick? Sometimes it's really obvious. It was easy for *Klas* to figure it out. "When I got closer to the Lövnäs tower it felt like a volume button was turned up. Tension increased in all my muscles. Every time I was about 50 meters from the tower I started trembling. My heart started beating irregularly, I got nauseous, my muscles felt weak and I had double vision."

Klas also noticed different symptoms from different transmission systems. "With GSM¹¹ it feels like a burning sensation in my head, my stomach muscles contract with cramps, my hands feel larger, and I get heart trouble. With UMTS¹² my muscles tighten and it feels like my heart is going to stop beating. It's really important to get away from the source as fast as possible. With digital cordless phones¹³ I get a buzzing and crawly feeling under my skin, and a constant pressure in my head."

Elisabeth says this about one of the places she had to flee from: —There were electrical fences close by. I could tolerate them before, but when the new wireless utility meters were installed I couldn't live there any longer. This added burden turned out to be too much for me. I couldn't even manage to talk on the phone. At night I tried to sleep in my car. It was parked in the woods but I still couldn't sleep. I lost weight and food went right through me. My body's equilibrium was completely out of balance.

"I thought it was psychological"

Sometimes it is quite hard to figure out what is actually causing the symptoms.

"I thought it was psychological," *Kenneth* says after telling me how he became dizzy and lost his focus every time he entered a store. When he felt sick in some of the apartments he lived in, for quite some time he linked the symptoms to mould.

¹¹ GSM=Global System for Mobile Communications. 2nd Generation.

¹² UMTS= Universal Mobile Telecommunications System. 3rd Generation.

¹³ DECT= Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

Naser: — When I experienced my first EHS symptoms, it was difficult to decipher what triggered them. At the time I reacted strongly to an electric candelabra, so I covered it with plastic wrap thinking it was the lacquer that bothered me. But it was the electromagnetic fields. And with the cell phones - I thought my reactions came from the chemical vapours. After a while, I knew how to differentiate between these things.

“I should feel good here...”

Sometimes the symptoms manifest suddenly and are therefore a bit tricky to figure out.

Eva: — Once we visited a cottage from the 17th century. It was fascinating to view it but I didn't feel well inside. I thought, “I must be going mad! There's no electricity in this old house, so this place should make me feel good.” That's when Thomas said: “Take a good look around. There are motion detectors and surveillance cameras all over this building.” I had been admiring the beautiful old furniture and did not pay attention to such things.

One sunny summer day after we bought the cottage outside Södertälje, we took off in the rowboat across the lake. Suddenly I felt worse in one particular area of the lake. We rowed away from there in a hurry, and I felt immediately better. After some time we noticed a sign that read: *High Voltage Cable*. It had been submerged along the bottom of the lake.

Thomas is often able to notice when I react to something, although I may be unaware of it myself.

'Practical' symptoms

My hostess *Siv* and I decide to go for a hike in the woods. A fresh blanket of snow is on the ground, and we notice some animal tracks. *Siv* stops and studies the tracks. “I wonder what it is. Not a wolf anyway, their tracks are bigger. Maybe a dog, although I can't see any human footprints. It must be a runaway.” *Siv* finds this a bit peculiar, because the dogs in the neighbourhood are not allowed to run loose.

During our walk *Siv*'s face gets increasingly red and puffy. When we return to the cottage her face is beet red. I am quite concerned and wonder what's wrong. “I don't know,” she answers. “I felt something the whole time. Some forestry equipment maybe?”

After a while we leave the cottage again, but in another direction downhill towards the road. That's when we happen to cross paths with a hunter carrying a shotgun. “This is our explanation,” *Siv* says. “They are still moose hunting. It is the hunter's cell phone I reacted to and also to their dogs, because they carry GPS trackers on their collars.

Later that day *Siv* wryly remarks how practical it is to get a red and puffy face, so people cannot help but notice how affected she is by electromagnetic radiation.

Involuntary testing

Björn: — When we first came to this area, other EHS refugees warned us about the forestry equipment. “It's possible to feel the effects from 10 kilometers away,” they said. “It can't be that bad,” we thought. In the beginning, it was absolutely wonderful around here. But one night I

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

woke up and felt terrible. I got up, looked out the window and saw a shining light three mountain ridges away. After a while the tension eased off. I looked out again – no lights! Suddenly I felt worse again, and I noticed the lights once more. These machines drive up and down the mountain ridges. When they get to the top of the ridges, the radiation from them reaches us too.

An involuntary provocation test happened when I first visited *Siv* and *Björn*. After we'd been chatting for a few hours, they politely asked me: "Did you bring something with a battery? A digital camera maybe? We react to them too." Oh no, I never even suspected the digital camera! What should I do now? Fortunately, removing the batteries did the trick.

The electromagnetic burden accumulates

The physical stress symptoms that many EHS refugees experience often has a cumulative effect that manifests as 'burnout.' This actually makes a lot of sense.

Stress, whatever its cause may be, affects the same systems in our body and brain. The stress defense and the immune system kicks in regardless of the root causes. It may be chemicals, drugs, the flu, psychological distress, work-related stress, electrical energy or a combination of several factors. Each stress factor contributes to the total physiological burden.

If the individual's immune system is already compromised by one or several causes, the addition of one more factor may be the breaking point. For example, *Elisabeth* could tolerate electrical fences. Her overload happened with the additional radiation from the new wireless utility meters.

A lowered threshold

When the burden of electromagnetic radiation becomes too much, the symptoms also intensify. This, in turn, results in longer recuperation time. The physical resistance is lowered, making the individual more sensitive. The price someone pays for ignoring the physical symptoms is high, and many end up with lifelong disabilities.

Mia: — The overall radiation is getting worse around here. But it's still better to stay put in this cabin and not venture into town. Sometimes we have to go shopping or, as in my case, make it to the vet with my dog. I know I'm disabled and I don't want to make it worse, so I look after myself by staying at home as much as possible.

"I look forward to the relief"

Many who suffer from EHS find it hard to describe the severity of their situation in a way that others will understand.

"That's how we all feel before we go on vacation," one politician remarked when a couple of EHS refugees recounted their stories. Hardly. We need to listen more closely.

"Everything is in shambles, and it's hard to focus on anything at all."

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

"My brain only seems to have a 20% capacity. It's getting harder and harder to think clearly."

"Sometimes I just want to die," are words most people blurt out carelessly at some point in their lives. I have done it myself, but I'll likely not do it again.

"I don't think I'll commit suicide. I hope not. But I look forward to the relief."

4] Symptoms: varying, changeable, intensifying

CHAPTER 6 A harsh life

Can you imagine a life without the following: TV, radio, telephone, computer, record player, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, light bulbs? Only a wood stove for heating and candles for light? Not likely. None of the people I interviewed could imagine this either before they were forced to live this way. One of the many barriers that make the life of an EHS refugee so harsh is all the things he or she has to do without.

Imagine not being able to walk around town or to shop, not even for groceries, or go to the recreation centre or play your favourite sport. Movies, concerts, libraries? Impossible. Not even at a doctor's or dentist's office.

Trying on new clothes in a store is off limits too. Shopping by mail order or wearing others' hand-me-downs becomes the norm. Get someone to do your shopping for you or, if you have no choice, write down a precise list of what you need, rush into the store, pick out your items quickly before the dizziness and disorientation overwhelm you, and then get out of there as quickly as you can. You can count on feeling sicker for a day or more afterwards.

You cannot travel by public transit because of the ubiquitous use of electronics in trains, buses and cars. You may be able to travel in an old car with basic electronics or maybe no car at all. Instead, you're being involuntarily stuck in one place, and not able to visit your aging parents or your children whenever they need you.

Maria: — It's a real sorrow not having access to movies, concerts, theatre, museums... Not being able to go to doctors or dentists and stores. I can handle one store in this community, but I always feel worse afterwards.

I can't listen to music or the radio. Short phone calls are OK. I can only use candles. The light is too soft for reading or sewing, so I don't do much of anything.

Mia: — I moved here with my dog three years ago. It took a week to warm up the house. The first morning I woke up to +2 Celsius, the next morning it was +4, and the third +6. You get used to it. I only have cold water. I live alone and I don't have a phone. Despite this, it was a relief to move here. The electricity is turned off, so I can't use any electrical appliances.

Siv: — What I miss the most is not being able to listen to music.

"I slipped a few times"

Sometimes the forced isolation gets to them, and EHS refugees do exactly the things they shouldn't do.

Inger: — I 'slipped' and went to a couple of concerts, and to a Christmas buffet at a hotel. I am concerned though, because I know what can happen afterwards. Still I sometimes keep thinking, "I don't care what happens, I'll manage somehow." I need to meet people, be part of

6] A harsh life

the world, because it's really important for my soul. I need to feel that I belong to this society. This excursion made me so much worse, that it will take a few months or so to recuperate. Next time I get that impulse I will be more careful.

EHS refugees can only fantasize about things that most of us take for granted.

Klas: - I want to go to Stockholm and just walk around. I love that city.

The continuous struggle

Since EHS refugees have to give up so many of the modern comforts, daily chores are a constant challenge. Imagine that the only suitable house you've found is dilapidated with mould in the basement, a leaky roof and sewage pipes that don't drain. You struggle daily to get out of bed, and you live on very limited financial means. This is how my hosts *Siv* and *Björn* live.

Siv tells me about other EHS refugees they know: — Some of us live in decrepit cabins, trailers, cars or tents. One man we know lives in a goat shack. A reporter wanted to come to his place for an interview, but he cancelled it at the last minute. He was too embarrassed about his home and couldn't cope with the thought of having to show it.

People wonder what we do all day, how we get the time to pass. "Living as a refugee is a very BUSY life!" *Siv* exclaims with her affable sarcasm, something I really admire in her.

This is what I notice during my *visits to Siv and Björn's* home: They bring in the firewood, rest from exhaustion, make a fire, pick up the mail, prepare food, rest from exhaustion, haul in the water, repair this or that, rest again, look for the papers they put somewhere to write yet another letter to the authorities, rest, once again try to repair what they failed to yesterday, discuss with a neighbour what to do about the mounting threats of wireless internet in their community, try to write another letter to the editor again... For many days nothing at all can be done, the days just disappear in a haze.

"I have to take just one more step..."

Siv: — A couple of EHS refugees lived here for a week before they could move into their own place. This took so much energy out of me that I practically counted every step I made. When this happens my only thought is, "I have to take just one more step..."

My sister called me a while ago and told me that she had been diagnosed with cancer. My first thought was: "It is so unfair. Why couldn't I have got it instead? I would have liked to. I don't intend to commit suicide, but I long for the relief. My neighbour down the road considers this an alternative and has said, "I may have to resort to that if life becomes totally unbearable".

CHAPTER 7 *Kenneth*: I thought it was psychological

Kenneth is in his forties and has just moved into a house, which he shares with three other EHS refugees.

— My symptoms started around 1994. But when I think of it, I reacted to fluorescent light and heaters long before that. My first apartment had old-fashioned heating elements, and I never felt well there. The same happened when I went into stores with a lot of fluorescent lights. At the time, I thought it was psychological. It took a while before I realized that the actual indoor environment made me sick.

I would get unfocused, forgetful and very tired. It felt a bit like being switched off from the world around. It feels so abstract and hard to describe. I felt something was wrong but couldn't figure out what it was. If you have the flu or a broken leg, it is obvious why you're not well. It was such a relief to finally get in touch with people who understood why and could help explain what was going on. My other thoughts were...maybe I have a tumour or brain damage or something like that.

My guess was mould contamination

— I also lived in a 1960s apartment building in the town Skara for a while, but felt sick there too. My guess was that the building was contaminated with mould or something like that. So I decided to move to a wood-framed house from the 1920s. I felt better there.

In 1999, I moved to another town to attend community college. I was determined to live in a building without mould, radon or chemicals. I vaguely remembered hearing something about electricity, but I didn't know what it meant. I didn't make the connection with my own situation. I managed to find an attic apartment in town. After I graduated I did a live-in trial at my brother's house outside Skara. When I once again had to find another apartment in town, electrical heating was not an option for me.

I need to do live-in trials before I rent or buy a place. I have lived in 25-30 different places by now and slept in both cars and tents...Now I own a camping trailer too.

For a while, I lived in a tent in the woods. Later on I found a cabin, but unfortunately with electrical heaters. Still I talked myself into trying it out for a while. I turned the heaters on during the day and spent a lot of time outdoors, and turned them off when I got home. It didn't work anyway.

I wanted to find a hobby farm in the country and I found my dream house in Dalsland County. But I felt really sick there too, probably from the electrical fences and the transmission towers in the area. It was so sad. I managed to last there from mid-June to October/November. That's when I moved here.

Wasting a couple of months each time

7] *Kenneth*: I thought it was psychological

— My dream is to buy my own house. I had a lead on a cabin, and I tried it out for 2-3 weeks, but I soon realized that it was no good. Every time I do a live-in trial, a couple of months get wasted. I just lie around apathetic and don't even have the strength to read or do anything of value. I feel relatively OK here. Now I'm careful about not taking risks with my health.

I have moved so many times...it's a mental drain just to unpack my stuff. The only things I bring with me nowadays are my backpack and my guitar.

About working. Employers do not welcome requests like, "Please replace the fluorescent lights. They make me sick." The likelihood of me being replaced instead is very high...

Like a hobo

— **This is** a real harsh life. I don't count on people to understand. In the beginning, people asked: "What on earth are you doing?" Then they have disappeared out of my life one by one. I have no contact with my family, although my son still sort of keeps in touch. He doesn't want to come and visit me here though, and I don't want to force him. I have to continue my live-in trial here to find out what happens. I've been forced to give up a lot. I have no family to help me, and I have not had an intimate relationship during this whole time.

It feels like I now depend on the good will of others. This must be how the hobos felt years ago, not being worth as much as their fellow human beings.

Nowadays, people use a lot of medicine, sleeping pills and anti-depressants. They suffer from fibromyalgia, headaches and muscle tension. When I watch people at work, I wonder: "Why are their bodies so tense?" What was it like during the Bronze Age, for instance? Did people suffer as much from headaches at that time too?

As it is today, people are not allowed to get sick. If you suffer from what is considered a medically diffuse illness, you are out of luck. But a cousin of mine once said to me, "Nobody would willingly live like you do. To call you a 'scam artist' is totally absurd!"

7] *Kenneth*: I thought it was psychological

CHAPTER 8 Losing family and friends

Being an EHS refugee often means losing friends, and sometimes family too. Many EHS sufferers know what it is like to be misunderstood or abandoned by the people they love or used to trust. *Inger's* husband left her because he could not accept living like her. *Kenneth* no longer has contact with his family.

Those still in touch with their families have to live with the agony of not being able to help their parents or children in their time of need. Invariably, the whole family suffers in one way or another.

Eva: — In 1992, my mother had a stroke and spent half a year in hospital before she died. It was very difficult for me to visit her. I risked it a couple of times anyway, but I was not able to be by her death bed.

Elisabeth: — My mother is 88 years old. We haven't seen each other for a long time. She got really sick last summer and ended up in hospital with intestinal hemorrhaging. And I didn't know anything about it. She didn't want to get in touch with me, since I couldn't help her anyway. I got very upset. *I have to know!* I cried a whole day about that. Imagine if she hadn't survived and I knew nothing about it!

I got some psychological coaching to cope with this, and in September I managed to make travel arrangements to see my mother. I forced myself to go, although I was feeling poorly. I visited her and we had a good talk. I felt extremely relieved. We said things we hadn't said before, and I was touched by her love and concern. "I will be with you all the time in my mind and spirit," I said to her.

It's so painful to realize that I won't be able to just go and see my mother if she ends up in hospital again. Or if something would happen to my children. Travelling to their homes to help out is not as simple as it sounds.

Siv: — I have never met my nieces' and nephews' four children. They can drive here to see me, but I don't have enough physical stamina for such visits any more. Having children around is very draining on someone like me.

The EHS refugee is not the only one suffering

The whole family is affected. *Eva's* husband *Thomas* is worn out with chronic pain in his hands from the many renovations he has had to make wherever they lived.

Thomas: — I was a store manager for several years and worked alongside 20-30 year olds. Reducing my work hours was impossible with all my responsibilities of the store. The final years were particularly exhausting. I left home around 7 a.m. and worked until 8-9 p.m. On top of that I had a long commute. During my time off I repaired and rebuilt our many homes. Sometimes I worked on the house until 1 a.m. and got up again at 6 a.m. I have done it all, plumbing and electricity too. It feels like I have removed miles of electrical wiring from walls.

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Eva: — How have our daughters been affected? They've had a sick mom all these years.

Thomas: — Naturally, they have been upset many times, especially when Eva couldn't attend events that their friends' moms were able to go to. One time when Eva's brother and brother-in-law visited us, our oldest daughter blurted out: "Can't you talk about something else? Just for once!?"

Eva: — Another time she said, "Mom, I pretend that you are well."

Inger: — My daughter became clinically depressed a few years ago. "Get some professional help!" I told her. So she went to see a psychologist to talk about her situation. Her problems were about having lost her mother, her given support system. Someone to go shopping with or other such mother-daughter outings. We've begun patching things up a bit, but there's still something missing.

Kenneth: — People usually don't understand. In the beginning they asked, "What on earth are you doing?" But they have disappeared from my life one by one. I have no contact with my family. I have some contact with my son, but he really doesn't want to visit me here, and I don't want to force him.

Eva: — We become inconvenient. We lose friends. They simply disappear. We are unable to visit them at their homes, and people don't like not being able to reciprocate invitations.

Inger: — Old friends and neighbours who used to be a big part of my life have slowly disappeared one by one. They think that I'm strange. I met one of my old neighbours when I lived in another cabin. "I haven't seen you for such a long time," she said. "I was thinking of visiting you but it's so cold. I'm worried about my leg pains." - Thanks, but don't bother to visit. Oh, and where do you imagine I hurt? I live in freezing temperatures all the time.

Where are all the people who cared about me? WHERE ARE THEY??? My closest friend is still part of my life. She has not given up on me. But all the others... They know I have a phone, so they could give me a call. But do they? Not a chance...

Klas: — Neighbours around here all react differently. Some think that we are a bunch of idiots, hypochondriacs, or that we abuse the social welfare system. They question things like: "How are they able to go to a party in town, or go shopping?" They have no clue what price we pay. To use an analogy of alcohol consumption: If you drink too much you feel really sick the next day. For us, the effect of electromagnetic radiation is not limited to just the day after.

One neighbour believes that we are welfare bums and that we create a negative atmosphere in this community. She says that she would never be able to get social benefits for "vague" symptoms such as ours.

Good things happen too. One time during the Christmas rush I was standing in a store lineup. The guy in front of me took out his cell phone and started talking. In those situations I often just grin and bear it, but that time I said: "Sorry, but I have to step out of the lineup for a while, because I get sick from cell phones." So I walked away. When I returned to my spot, the person behind me tapped me on the shoulder and asked: "Excuse me, but what do you mean - you

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get sick? What happens?" The other people around us turned around and listened when I explained the symptoms. Afterwards the guy who asked the question wished me a Merry Christmas.

Elisabeth: — People have a really hard time understanding. Often when I've asked people to turn off their cell phones and unplug their digital cordless phones my requests have been respected. Sometimes they ask, "How can my cell phone affect you when I'm not even using it?" The only answer I have is, "I don't know exactly why, but I get symptoms just the same." Among other things, my heart starts to beat irregularly.¹⁴

At that time I was not as sick as I am now, and then it was easier for people to understand. Nowadays when it is so much worse, people have a really hard time understanding.

Naser: — When our neighbour in the summer cabin next door arrives, we have to leave our home. He's promised not to use his cell phone here, but he does it anyway. No use getting violent, although I really feel like it sometimes!

Björn: — Our neighbours and their friends are a constant threat to us, because we never know when they bring stuff around that we'll get sick from. At times someone will cut across our property with their cell phones turned on to test us. Can you imagine ever doing that to someone with a nut allergy; putting a few nuts in their food to see if they get sick? ... It seems like we are fair game.

¹⁴ A cell phone in 'snooze' mode also emits microwaves. Its functions remain active with signals radiating to the nearest relay antenna.

8] Losing family and friends

CHAPTER 10 Contradicted, and not trusted

How are EHS people treated when they seek help from doctors, authorities, civil servants and so on? As you might expect, it varies. Some people have positive experiences. They received help – or at least some understanding.

Kenneth: — I was lucky to find a doctor, someone who knew about EHS and also treated me with respect.

Maria: — My doctor believed me but couldn't help me. He said that our society doesn't have the necessary resources.

However, the prevailing answer is this:

Inger: — I went to Social Services about my housing needs. After I told her about my plight, she hissed at me: "EHS is not scientifically proven. If you apply for services, I'll make sure that your application gets rejected!"

'Delusional thinking'

Before I met the EHS refugees, I knew of a 25 year old man who also suffered from EHS. His most debilitating symptom was severe body pains. When he finally realized that his attacks were linked to electricity and cell phones, he tried to explain this to his doctor, who immediately started talking about drugs. After the appointment he happened to glance at the file. His diagnosis was: delusions.

Elisabeth: — The doctor dismissed my complaints. "EHS doesn't exist!" How could he say so?! My symptoms so evidently displayed in front of the computer. He just didn't want to hear me, and instead prescribed a week's sick leave for 'inexplicable dizziness.' He also referred me to another physician. Great, I thought, hopefully a smarter doctor. He was worse. He allowed more time for the appointment and spent that time giving me a lecture. "People have always been afraid of new technology. When trains were introduced, people believed that the speed of the train was really dangerous. Today people think computers are dangerous."

After that he launched into what he described as mass psychosis, similar to the 19th century 'frog illness,' when people believed they had live frogs in their stomachs. He made parallels between 'frog illness' and the debilitating symptoms from mercury amalgam and electromagnetic hypersensitivity. He called all of it mass psychosis.

He also asked me if I disliked my job. But I loved my job. He didn't allow for sick leave, but insisted that I continue with computer work, at least part-time. The only help he offered me was a referral to a psychologist. When I politely asked him to turn off the fluorescent lights in his office because they bothered me so much, he simply ignored my request.

I went to see the doctor because I was in desperate need of help. I didn't understand my body's reactions. It was terribly insulting to not be believed, only distrusted. I felt completely defeated. I cried and cried.

Dolls and baby shoes?!

Mia: — National Insurance wanted me to travel to Nynäshamn for a 4-day examination and stay at a hotel that was 50 meters from a 3G tower. This was obviously impossible. As an alternative they contacted a consultancy for the job assessment. I then had a visit by a doctor, a physiotherapist and a psychologist.

The psychologist had brought dolls and a pair of baby shoes. She started our session by talking about how things sometimes happen during childhood, and how these memories can keep festering inside.

I didn't understand a thing. I said: - I thought this was about why I am not able to work. Have you read my report? No, she had not received it. - What do you know about me? "That you have lived in this cabin for a few years, that your husband died, and you are a widow."

She knew absolutely nothing about my background. She presumed it was psychological. My childhood experiences and my husband's death..."

"You don't live in reality"

Eva: — We have to be very resilient psychologically to cope with the world around us. Even after all these years,¹⁵ there is still little understanding, but plenty of doubt and mistrust.

When doctors don't know what's wrong, they send us to psychologists or psychiatrists. I was sent to a psychiatrist with a bizarre approach. He sat with his feet on the table and challenged me: "So you can feel electricity. Describe it!" I did, and that's when he pounded his fist on the table and yelled: "You don't live in reality. We have had electricity for over a hundred years!"

Our health care system is appalling. It seems like it's perfectly okay for physicians to talk to us with contempt. Even today I won't tell a doctor that I suffer from EHS. It gets too complicated. I've been called for a mammogram, and I won't tell them either. I just have to endure.

It's not healthy to stay silent just because health professionals choose to have unprofessional attitudes.

My thoughts precisely.

Scared of new technology? No, delighted

One common belief my new friends constantly hear is that they are afraid of new technology, that their symptoms are psychological. My interviews reveal a different story. Many of them have been totally immersed in new technology. Like *Inger* who spent many nights in front of the computer, or *Klas* who worked as a multimedia producer. Maybe that's the reason why they got sick.

Elisabeth tells me how it all started for her.

¹⁵ The Swedish Association for the ElectroSensitive (aka FEB) was founded in 1987.

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— I worked as a preschool teacher. It was a lot of fun, although quite the strain on my body. I ended up on part-time sick leave because of pains in my shoulders and neck. I realized that it would be hard to return to work full-time. So instead I took a course in graphic design. I worked on a computer. It was so much fun. My new-found career!

When I finished my education, I got an apprenticeship. After three weeks I felt burnt out. I was dizzy and really tired, had heart trouble, skin and eye problems, headaches, and felt so unfocused. One morning I experienced those symptoms as soon as I turned on the computer. "I won't make it," I thought and went home and spent a couple of days in bed shivering.

I was quite sick but had no idea that it could be EHS, because I didn't know what it was.

A phobia? Quite the opposite!

Calling EHS a phobia is not too unusual. However, nobody I've talked to displays phobic reactions. A phobic individual categorically avoids situations and places that present as frightening, often beyond reason.

My friends proved the opposite to be true. They deliberately tested locations, where they had noticed that their symptoms got worse. They valiantly walked towards cell phone transmission towers and electrical fences to verify their symptoms. By doing so they found out what they can tolerate, what causes discomfort, and what is disabling for them.

Many also keep on doing what they know they should avoid. They go into stores, although this makes them worse, or go to a concert or a restaurant, because they can't stand being isolated all the time. They visit relatives, although they always get struck by overwhelming fatigue. This is the direct opposite to phobic behaviour.

Eva: — I get stubborn sometimes. I don't want to be affected by EHS. I want to be normal! That's when I do things I shouldn't be doing, like traveling somewhere just to get the opportunity to mingle with people. And that's how I get sicker.

Many of the people I interviewed knew they were sensitive to something, although the explanation came later. *Eva* talks about how her husband detected how she got increasingly worse in the cottage museum, while she wondered if she was imagining things.

My conclusion is that all the people I interviewed are very rational and tell their stories with remarkable insight. It makes no sense for a physician or anyone else listening to them to even consider that their symptoms are just imagination, psychological weakness or a mental aberration. Unbelievable really. It makes me wonder- with a grain of sarcasm: *Is the medical profession delusional?!?*

Why the denial?

Björn: — We are not treated as real human beings, and our experiences do not count.

I keep wondering why these first-hand experiences are so hard for society to accept. I presume there are a number of contributing factors.

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One reason is likely the powerful economic interests surrounding the telecommunications industry, supported by our government. History tells us that this is nothing new. The same happened with the tobacco and asbestos scandals, with several pharmaceutical drugs, with pesticides, and herbicides too. The industry resists the spread of vital facts by covering up with disinformation, until the facts are too obvious to ignore.

The consequences

When it comes to family and friends, there are other reasons why they choose to avoid the truth. Acceptance may mean having to make major lifestyle changes. Many are so accustomed to electrical gadgets, cell phones and cordless phones and do not want to take in new information. It may hamper the routines, the relationships or the lifestyles.

Mia: — My family is willing to help me, but they don't really get what this is all about. The backlash we experience is not only from the industry but from the people around us as well. Few are willing to live without their wireless gadgets. Most of our relatives won't, and that's very hard on us. Everyone has surrendered to the marketing trends. I'd probably do the same if this hadn't happened to me. I'd likely be stuck in the same mess too.

Provocations

Björn: — Before we bought this cottage, we went and talked to our neighbour-to-be in the summer cottage next door. We told him that we would buy this property, provided that nobody uses a cell phone around us. So we would appreciate if he spoke his mind on the subject. We asked if he would be willing to leave his cell phone at home when visiting his cottage. "Sure, of course." After all, he already had a landline there. Again we asked: - Are you sure? We don't want to pester you. "No problem," he assured us.

Nowadays, when he and his family arrive, they always bring their cell phones along. When we mentioned it again, he blurted out: "Enough already!" - But don't you remember your word?" "Yes, but that was three years ago!" Now we have to flee whenever they come around.

We are always on guard, and when they arrive we take off right away. As soon as we hear a car we check out who it is. If we ignore their arrival, we may be too debilitated after a few minutes, which makes it harder for us to escape. One time our neighbour arrived with his family while I was out for a walk in the forest. When I came back I found *Siv* on the ground beside the wood pile. She had fainted.

Neighbours and friends become 'enemies', because we never know when they bring something along to make us sick. Sometimes people in our community cut across our property with activated cell phones just to test us, to see if we *really* react!! We are treated as fair game.

Siv, who could sense my digital camera, comments: "Several provocation studies have been done on EHS sufferers and cell phones. This type of testing is supposed to reveal if we can detect if the phones are on or off. The problem is that these laboratory studies are carried out in very unhealthy locations for people like us. When I go into town I don't notice right way when

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someone turns on a cell phone, because I am already numbed by the overall radiation. It's like being in a smoke-filled room and asked to detect when someone lights up another cigarette.¹⁶

Other studies have focused on identifying psychological differences between EHS sufferers and 'normal' people. It should come as no surprise that these tests have failed.¹⁷

World concept threatened

Maybe EHS threatens our perception of the modern world too much. Maybe that is why physicians are able to say this condition does not exist, or that EHS is a form of delusion? It seems very difficult to accept that human beings can be affected by electromagnetic signals, despite the fact that our body, heart, nervous system and brain also function on such signals. EKG and EEG are electrical phenomena.

Although other forms of electromagnetic waves, such as x-rays, radioactivity and radar are very harmful, people still buy into the notion that these waves are harmless.

Fact remains that the physiological functions in living beings are controlled by subtle electrical impulses and waves, all the way down to the cellular level. Since electromagnetic fields have a synergistic effect on each other, it should be easy to understand that our body's electrical system can be negatively affected by man-made electromagnetic fields, especially microwave radiation. Nowadays, each one of us is subjected to artificial radiation a billion times stronger than the natural background radiation that we are biologically built to withstand.

Biased expert

In August 2007, the Swedish television news program *Aktuellt* exemplified how skepticism surrounding this issue plays out in this country. The report began with the argument that municipalities have spent millions on electromagnetic mitigation efforts for EHS sufferers, despite the lack of scientific proof that these efforts solve any problems. An odd statement considering that very few municipalities spent any money at all.

Professor Lena Hillert delivered the scientific commentary. She is known for her opinion on EHS, namely that it can be cured by using cognitive therapy. Worth noting is that the Auditor General's Office deemed her a biased expert in 2000,¹⁸ since she also works for the telecom industry. During the television interview she was once again asked: "Is it dangerous to do electromagnetic mitigation? She answered, and I quote:

¹⁶ Commentary: Excerpt from Swedish book *About Electrohypersensitivity* (Hélène Aastrup-Samuels): One research study by Dr W. Rea and his colleagues at the Environmental Health Clinic in Dallas, Texas tested individual sensitivity to electromagnetic frequencies. They examined the pupils of EHS sufferers during various frequency exposures and identified the frequencies the subjects reacted to. Other provocation tests confirmed these findings. *Evaluation of the Anatomic Nervous System Response by Pupillographical Study in the Chemically Sensitive Patient*.

¹⁷ Professor Bengt Arnetz, Chief Physician, Centre for Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Huddinge Regional Hospital:

"The psychological model or that electrohypersensitives are more prone to psychiatric conditions is unfounded. Cancer & Allergy Foundation Magazine, #1, 1996.

¹⁸ In connection to the RALF survey, 1997 (Council for Work Life Research). Now defunct.

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—There may be a danger insofar as the individual may subject himself or herself to limits; that he or she feels a need to isolate from society, family and friends. There may also be a risk that others begin to wonder if certain environments are harmful, since they are being tested and mitigated for people who feel sick. Maybe thinking, “Is it dangerous for me too?”

In other words, health & safety precautions are a threat to people. *I could hardly believe my ears.*

All over the country, EHS sufferers are continually searching for tolerable living environments. One such group, *Frivolten*, has been working for a few years on locating areas where the overall radiation is low enough to build EHS housing. Suitable areas have been found, and a few municipalities have expressed their interest. However, existing laws make it difficult to protect these locations from the wireless build-out. *Frivolten* continues tenaciously to look for options, despite the many barriers.

A group in the town of Degerfors actually found a suitable apartment building for EHS. A plan also went ahead for electromagnetic mitigation, with the financial support from SBO (National Mortgage & Housing). The response from the municipality was positive, and 150 people applied for the apartments. That’s when the Industry weighed in on the matter with an e-mail from MTB (Telecom Industry Association) Chief Executive Mats Holme. He insisted that no proof existed that electromagnetic mitigation improves health. Alas, the municipality changed its position – no EHS-friendly building in this town.

Not only in Sweden

Sometimes the public debate argues that EHS exists only in Sweden, and thereby alluding to it being an imaginary illness. This is absolutely not true. In every country where this issue has been raised, the same symptoms have been found: dizziness, severe headaches, nausea, poor short-term memory, confusion, tinnitus and disturbed sleep.

In Austria an estimated 3,5% of the population suffers from EHS, a number that has doubled in the last ten years. In Germany it is 9% and in Switzerland 5%.

Support groups for EHS sufferers exist in Germany, Austria and several other countries. EHS sufferers are reaching out across the borders to help each other. The primary issue is to find tolerable living environments.

Irish doctors (IDEA) has released public alerts, and so have physicians in the US, Austria and Japan. German doctors are very active. They also pioneered with the Freiburg Appeal in 2002.

The Freiburg Appeal: “Our great concern - the health of our fellow human beings”

In 2002, 60 German physicians began their appeal with:

“As established physicians in all fields, especially in environmental medicine, we turn to the medical establishment and that in public health, political domains, and to the public to express our deep concern for the health of our fellow men.”

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These doctors had in recent years noticed “a dramatic rise in chronic and serious diseases”, including:

- Learning, concentration, and behavioural disorders (attention deficit disorder, ADD)
- Extreme fluctuations in blood pressure, not responding satisfactorily to pharmaceutical treatment
- Heart rhythm disorders
- Heart attacks and strokes among an increasingly younger population
- Brain-degenerative diseases (Alzheimer’s) and epilepsy
- Cancer: leukemia, brain tumours
- Headaches, migraines
- Chronic fatigue
- Agitation, anxiety
- Night-time sleeplessness, day-time sleepiness
- Tinnitus
- Susceptibility to infection
- Unspecific nerve and muscle pains.

The German physicians conclude that microwave radiation in their patients’ living environments is the culprit. They write:

“Very often long-term disease or affliction improve or disappear in a relatively short time after the reduction or elimination of microwave radiation in the patient’s environment.”

The Appeal continues:

“Our therapeutic efforts to restore health are becoming increasingly less effective. The unimpeded and continuous penetration of radiation into living and working areas – particularly bedrooms, an essential place for relaxation, regeneration and healing – causes uninterrupted stress and prevents the patient’s full recovery.”

Several thousand German physicians have now signed the Freiburg Appeal.

The Bamberg Appeal: “We demand immediate action”

A couple of years later physicians in the German town of Bamberg initiated a more systematic survey on how people are affected by, for example, radiation from cell phone transmission towers. This study resulted in a letter to Germany’s Environmental Health Minister in 2006:

“There is an acute health risk for people living close to the mentioned mobile base stations. It is necessary for authorities to act immediately.”

More quotes from the letter:

“From October 2004 to January 2006, over 900 individuals were interviewed at 184 locations with transmission towers. Measurements were completed in homes or at workplaces.”

Summary of physicians’ clinical observations:

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"A new, very complicated disease profile with characteristic symptomatic combinations is observed from digital high frequency electromagnetic fields (from relay antennas, digital cordless phones, WLAN,¹⁹ etc.), far below current safety standards."

This description is followed by a list of symptoms similar to that of the Freiburg Appeal.

"The harmful health effects affect us all, our children and yours. We cannot ignore this fact. We ask you therefore to take action immediately."

The BioInitiative Report

In September 2007 the BioInitiative Report was released by independent researchers, who had reviewed thousands of reports and articles, and concluded that electromagnetic fields cause numerous health problems. Quotes from the BioInitiative Report:

"There is little doubt that electromagnetic fields emitted by cell phones and cell phone use affect electrical activity of the brain."

Official warnings

- In August 2007 the German Environmental Minister published a warning on the installation of wireless internet in schools.
- EEA – European Environmental Agency – also published a warning about the health effects from wireless technology based on the BioInitiative Report. EEA demands immediate action for the reduction of exposures to cell phones, transmission towers and wireless systems.

And in Sweden???

¹⁹ Wireless internet (Wireless Local Area Network)

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CHAPTER 11 Human Rights: in theory and practice

Before I got to know the EHS sufferers I thought that Sweden was a country where, as a rule, laws and human rights were respected. I've changed my opinion on this matter.

A recognized functional impairment

In Sweden, electrohypersensitivity (EHS) is recognized as a functional impairment. According to Swedish law, the municipalities are required to assist people who are unable to manage daily living as a result of their functional impairment. Your needs are supposed to determine what assistance you are entitled to, nothing else.

Elisabeth: — I was unable to go shopping, do laundry or use the telephone. I needed help because I was disabled. A social worker came here to talk to me about my needs for assistance with shopping, laundry, post office and bank errands, and someone to make phone calls so I could find a new place to live. A week later he came back and asked: "How do you feel?" - Getting by, better than at my previous home but I'm far from well, I said. "Well, I can't understand how you manage to live here. It's just 14 kilometers to the radio and television mast, and it emits so and so many kilowatts. How can you handle that?"

In other words, he questioned my disability. Instead of evaluating my need for assistance, he had checked the transmission data for the television mast. According to the law, the individual's needs determine what assistance is required. He did not follow the national policy protocol.

His reasoning against my eligibility for assistance also attacked my ability to drive, which I sometimes do when I feel a bit better. He said: "Our rules are such that if you can drive the car to the store, you cannot get shopping assistance. *Yet, I was unable to go inside the store!* In other words, he didn't bother to put my needs in context to *my particular problems and difficulties*.

After that National Insurance rejected my request, despite my doctor's personal conversation with the social worker for over an hour. My reaction to the rejection letter was *shock!* It was unbelievable to me.

Elisabeth adds, after recounting her experiences: "During my stay at the campground, Social Services in that municipality helped out right away. A female social worker came by to find out what I needed. "What do you need help with?" she asked. - Food, laundry, post office and bank errands a couple of times a week, I replied. "Will two times a week be sufficient? You have such a small fridge. I think you need help three times a week," she said. She believed me. It felt like such a boost.

It is appalling that we have to argue about basic human rights in our country. According to our national Social Services legislation, a person unable to manage daily routines has the right to assistance.

Siv's commentary: —Rights?! Politicians often remark to us: "You have the same rights as all of us." That implies that we are entitled to home assistance with no electromagnetic hazards. As

an example, since the severity of my symptoms makes me unable to manage my daily routines. It would mean that the home care workers must not use cell phones or other wireless technology and arrive in cars without advanced electronics. They would have to clean without a vacuum cleaner and cook on a wood stove. So far, I'm not aware of anyone receiving this kind of home assistance.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁰

Sweden has ratified the UN Ruling on Human Rights. Here are some citations:

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 12: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13: Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

What do these rights mean to the EHS sufferer? Personal safety when constantly exposed to harmful electromagnetic radiation? Freedom to travel when unable to use regular transit? Freedom to choose when there are hardly any places left to live with low radiation? Nobody should be treated disrespectfully. What should we call the conduct demonstrated by physicians and other authorities towards several of my friends?

Savings wiped out

Many of my new friends have had their savings wiped out, and their rights to obtain financial assistance is constantly questioned.

Inger: — I wrote a letter to Social Services and told them about my situation, but my application was turned down. The social worker never visited me in any of my homes: in the trailer, the cabin, or by the tree stump.

Mia: — They terminated my disability benefits. It was so surreal to get this news. After some time I got it reinstated. Right now they are reassessing everyone on disability in this district. The pressing question is, will I keep my eligibility? If not, how will I get enough money to move? Where will I be able to live?

This pressure is relentless: Will I get financial assistance from National Insurance? What happens if I don't? We are constantly questioned and scrutinized.

Mia's claim was rejected. The authorities are of the opinion that she is able to re-enter the job market.

²⁰ United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, December 20, 1993

While I was traveling around to visit the EHS refugees, I kept mulling over many questions. One of them was: Why don't people believe them?

I returned home with many more questions. Why don't people listen to them? I had met several exceptionally lucid, wise and pragmatic individuals. If someone is able to clearly describe his or her symptoms and what actually happens to them in specific locations, why don't people believe them? If several hundred people experience basically the same thing, why don't people believe them? If millions of people in other countries also experience the same symptoms, without any contact with each other, why are they still not heard?

People with EHS have learnt a lot about their condition and their symptoms. And also about how they can get better or worse. They also know how it is possible to live a better, or at least a more tolerable life. We need to learn from them instead of doubting them. They have a message for us all: EHS can happen to anyone!

There is no logical reason to believe that these people's physique, central nervous system or brain are any different from yours or mine. What happened to them can happen to you or me. During an epidemic, not everyone get sick. Some people are more susceptible and/or are subjected to more harmful exposure. They get sick. Next time others will get sick. The question now is: Are we at the beginning of a new epidemic?

Clearly, we should be creating low radiation areas for people with EHS, where they can live with dignity. For the sake of our children and future generations, instead of escalating electromagnetic pollution, we must reduce it!

12] Listen to them!

BACK COVER

A Beautiful Prison- Forced to Flee from Wireless Technology.

- *Swedes as refugees in their own country.*

Gunilla Ladberg, PhD in Education, lecturer, author to 20+ books, including *The human brain – a journey of discovery*. She lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

A Beautiful Prison is about regular citizens who are forced to flee their work and home in the advanced country of Sweden. Meet *Klas* - a multi-media producer, *Elisabeth* - a graphic designer, *Maria* - a teacher.....

Their debilitating symptoms stem from the ever-present electromagnetic environments, like dizziness, heart irregularities, headaches, fatigue, concentration difficulties, skin & eye irritation.

Maria: We are treated like lepers, but at least they were fortunate to get their own island.

Inger: I am determined to be around when others finally get it. When we are able to say: - We told you so! Why didn't you listen to us?!

Anyone in today's hi-tech society can become a refugee in their own country. Their stories have to be told. Their problems concern us all. But where is our social justice?

Excerpt from review by the 'Swedish Library Association' (*Bibliotekstjänst*):- This book has a simple and emphatic format with a powerful social commitment. It is startling. The message shows credibility from an Insider's perspective. It is valuable as a contribution to a current problem.

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APPENDIX A: Index - subheadings

1. *Inger*: - In 3 days my life changed forever

- > Lengthy conversations on a cordless phone
- > I lived behind a tree stump
- > I have no home
- > Divorce
- > My daughter's reserve
- > The book bus
- > "This is your life"
- > I want to be around when people finally get it!

2. The impossible escape

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- > Two years in the basement
- > Complete collapse
- > *Elisabeth's* escape
- > Fleeing again
- > I cried and kicked the trees
- > Alone at a deserted campground
- > Forced to flee again
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- > It's the CELLTOWERS !
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- > GIRL 11 - *Johanna* cannot attend elementary school
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- > Legal battle
- > The physician reported us
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- > 'Delusional thinking'
- > Dolls and baby shoes?!
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APPENDIX C: References and Recommended Reading

Scientific Mega Studies & Reviews

The BioInitiative Report. Published in 2007. An independent mega review by scientists, researchers & public health policy professionals advocating for biologically-based exposure standards of electromagnetic radiation. www.bioinitiative.org

REFLEX study. Released in 2005 and financed by the European Union. Between 2000-2004, 12 research teams from 7 European countries found that electromagnetic fields have a genotoxic effect on human cells, i.e. harmful effects on the DNA far below current Swedish safety limits. The results show that the effects damage the DNA and also impede body systems.

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Electromagnetic Fields. A Consumer's Guide to the Issues and How to Protect Ourselves. B. Blake Levitt. 1995.

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www.hetprojectet.info

