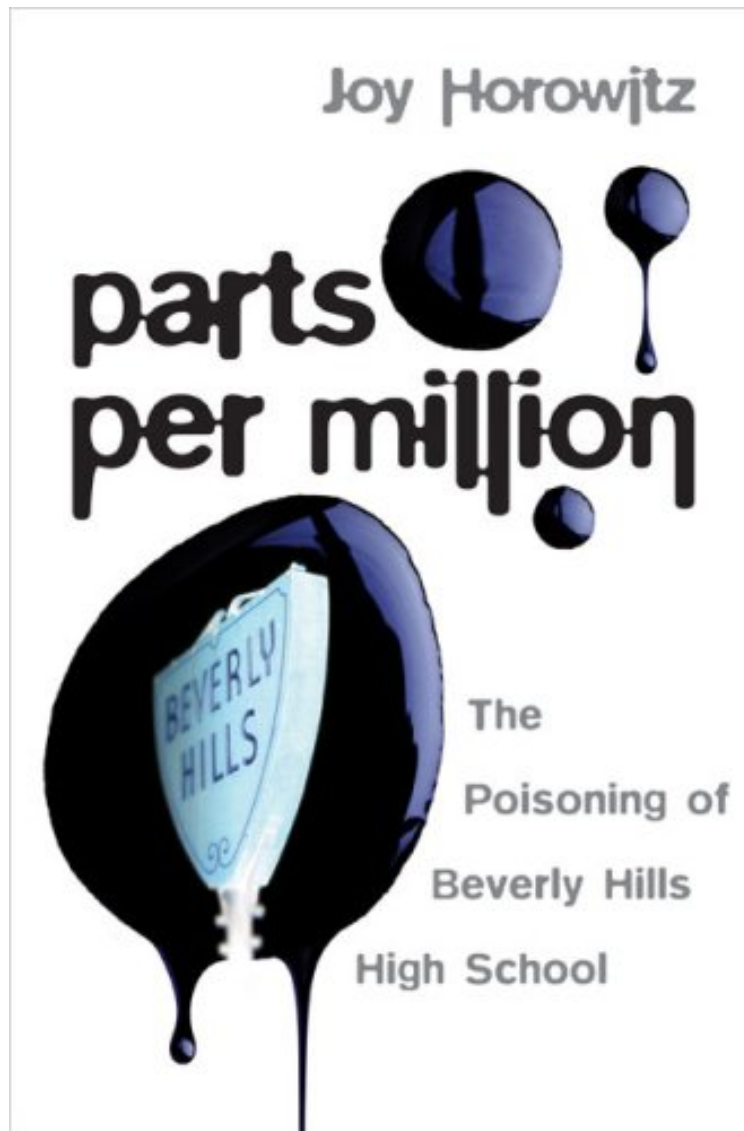


[Download pdf] Parts per Million: The Poisoning of Beverly Hills High School

Parts per Million: The Poisoning of Beverly Hills High School

Joy Horowitz

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#2401303 in Books Viking Adult 2007-07-19 2007-07-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.28 x 1.41 x 6.34l, .0 #File Name: 0670037982464 pages Joy Horowitz Environmental Natural Resources Law Biographies Memoirs | File size: 60.Mb

Joy Horowitz : Parts per Million: The Poisoning of Beverly Hills High School before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Parts per Million: The Poisoning of Beverly Hills High School:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Mystery Science 90210 By Jay Lehr "The Poisoning of Beverly Hills High School" is a provocative yet clear title. It may be true and it may not be, but the story is told by a very talented

insider who in the end lets the reader decide, though she herself is certainly convinced. The book should appeal to readers of fiction, for it once again proves that truth can be as thrilling as the escape one achieves with a good novel. Horowitz is a wife and mother whose family lives in Santa Monica, not far from where she graduated high school in Beverly Hills. She is a journalist and writer with extraordinary talent who tells a comprehensive, thoughtful, and lucid tale about fascinating individuals, private corporations, and boring bureaucrats, in the style of a mystery novel that places the reader in the shoes of the narrator, seeing what she sees.

School in Oil Field What is described in this story is more like occupational oil field worker exposure than general environmental exposure. But in this unusual case the workers are students and teachers at a high school that all but sits in the middle of the producing oil field. Seven oil field derricks are just outside the windows of the school. Anecdotal evidence of health problems associated with the school mounted steadily as no fewer than 10 teachers in the English Department on the high school's third floor contracted cancer over time. The book has as many characters as *War and Peace* and would have benefited from a character chart like the one that accompanies many printings of Tolstoy's novel. One gets to know a wonderful group of dedicated teachers, some with Ivy League credentials, training many students to take their places within the hallowed halls of America's greatest universities. A star of the book is our old friend and frequent fraudulent rabble rouser, Erin Brockovich, fresh from her fame writ large in the movie *Erin Brockovich*. In addition, it's quite obvious the book and movie *A Civil Action* inspired Horowitz to write this book. I am sure she is hopeful of achieving equal success. While she may well deserve it, I doubt that she will achieve it, for reasons I'll explain shortly.

Big Monetary Return The very active oil wells surrounding the school provided \$75,000 in royalties to the community each month, in part paying for the high school's amazing swimming pools and dance studios. Many of the families receiving those royalties had children attending the school. To her credit, Horowitz admits the book is not about certainty but "is instead, intended to pose a range of questions. ... [P]eople want to know what I really think; is there solid proof of a connection between environmental exposures and illness at Beverly Hills High School? The question could take decades to answer with any degree of certainty." She casts this statement in light of the fact that the initial dozen plaintiffs lost their case in court. Of course, that did not stop the publisher from titling the book in such a sensational manner.

Celebrity Hypocrisy But you have to be impressed by a book that describes Erin Brockovich like this: "At 42, Erin Brockovich seemed larger than life for reasons beyond her newfound celebrity status. Her physical stature--she is five feet nine and big boned--lends her an ian presence, like a female warrior. And her trademark cleavage, a result of the almost comical breast implants that gave her the desired Barbie-esque proportions, imparts a sort of self-mocking air, like the bombshell from *The Producers*: if you've got it flaunt it." Horowitz goes on to denigrate Brockovich fittingly, explaining how her ambulance-chasing law firm gave her a \$2.5 million bonus, after which she went out and bought a silver BMW, then traded it in for a black Hummer--not exactly standard issue for someone fighting for the environment. Eventually someone advised her to buy a Toyota Prius.

Case Thrown Out The trial brought by the first 12 plaintiffs ended before it even began, when the judge dismissed all causes of action for lack of evidence. The plaintiffs' experts could not provide evidence to support their theory that benzene from the oil wells had promoted cancers by suppressing the immune systems of already-vulnerable populations of students and faculty. Benzene exposures are thought to require 20 to 60 parts per million over a number of years in order to create leukemia-type symptoms. Beverly Hills High students and faculty were exposed only to single-digit parts per billion. Doubts Remain While there is evidence the oil companies exceeded emissions permits, it remains extremely difficult to prove people are being made ill as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals. No one denies the oil field is creating an increased health risk. The question is how much. Horowitz tells us, "The corporate polluters don't deny they emit hazardous substances at the high school. They insist, however, that they are so tiny as to be inconsequential. In the eyes of the law, these chemical exposures are 'trivial.'" While Horowitz states her opinion clearly, she still lets the story tell itself. She is not overly strident or even too emotional, even though she actually lived the story, loved the people and the place, and now tells it as a journalist with a particular perspective. Are her suspicions correct? Is the cancer cluster at Beverly Hills High School the result of the oil wells that enable them to have few budgetary worries? It may in fact be one more cancer cluster that is attributable to statistical randomness more than anything else. On the other hand, building a high school in an active oil field may not be such a good idea.

Jay Lehr, Ph.D. [...] is science director for The Heartland Institute. 8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A compelling, fascinating wake up call
By M. A. Dinolfo
Joy Horowitz, a journalist by trade, has taken the discipline, curiosity and objectivity inherent to her profession and applied these attributes to an intensely controversial, emotional topic--whether the industries adjacent to her alma mater, Beverly Hills High School, have, for decades, poisoned the children who are students there. For many years the presence of an oil drilling platform immediately adjacent to the athletic fields and, on another side of the campus, the proximity to the facilities that process the air for nearby Century City, have been a subject of vigorous debate regarding their potential for causing health hazards. The appearance of cancer "clusters" among the alumni and faculty of Beverly Hills High School was trivialized by school administrators and minimized by city officials. Four years in the writing, Horowitz has meticulously investigated all angles of this story, mastering the most technical of material and rendering it with an articulate, personal, and comprehensible style. What emerges will change forever the way you think about where you work, live, and play. Of even greater import, it

demands that everyday people begin to analyze the impact that "progress" has on our health and safety, and no longer complacently believe that someone else has our best interests at heart. 8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. *Human Tragedy* By Karen F. This intense, clearly and compellingly written, painstakingly researched epic is a human tragedy set in a medical and environmental disaster affecting children and their teachers, and the residents of an entire neighborhood. While similar cancer clusters have appeared in other locations, the clear cause of the cancer cluster at Beverly Hills High School has blinded the local government, parents and other residents, and has caused them to act against the best interests of their children and community, dooming them to a huge risk of an array of early fatal cancers. Horowitz has dug deeply into the scientific background and legal action of this disaster, producing a page-turner, despite the volume of information. If this can happen in a wealthy community with the resources of Beverly Hills, it can happen anywhere (and is). Anyone interested in the intersection between business and environmental and legal issues must read this excellent book, which in my opinion should win the Pulitzer Prize!!!!

A journalist's unsettling and timely investigation into the ties between Beverly Hills, its oil wells, and a local cancer cluster at Beverly Hills High School is the crown jewel of a storied community that has long symbolized wealth and privilege. No one, including the author (class of 1971), thought twice about the oil pumps behind the school's athletic fields; the derricks were just a part of the landscape, bringing in a sizable amount of royalty money to the community. But in 2003, after a group of young graduates developed cancer and the loudmouthed and sensationalistic Erin Brockovich caused a stir claiming the drilling was the cause, Beverly Hills was dragged into a landmark tort case that has split the town in two and will cause a media stir when it goes to trial later this year. In *Parts per Million*, Joy Horowitz tells the story behind the headlines, interviewing cancer specialists, lawyers, epidemiologists, city officials, residents, and Brockovich herself. She crafts a riveting picture of PTA moms fighting for the truth, parents in denial, cancer-ridden youth, a school board terrified of having failed in its obligation to keep kids safe, and the complex game of toxic tort litigation that stands to strike a huge financial blow to the powerful oil companies and the iconic community. A Civil Action meets *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Parts per Million* couches medical and scientific inquiry in a compelling legal drama. Horowitz examines our tangled relationship with oil, money, and the environment, and bravely questions how many more will have to die before government regulators put economics aside and heed the warnings of science.

From Publishers Weekly: Commingling fame and wealth, Beverly Hills embodies the modern version of the American dream, but journalist Horowitz (Tessie and Pearlie) argues that it's also a modern American nightmare. Her tale of corporate neglect, petty politics, endless legal wrangling and our love-hate relationship with petroleum centers on Beverly Hills High School and its illustrious alumni, oil derricks and alarming number of cancer victims. Initially skeptical of the idea that the profitable oil pumps adjacent to the school have led to an array of horrible diseases among its graduates, especially with celebrity advocate Erin Brockovich poking around the case, Horowitz quickly found herself pulled into a story that raises fundamental questions about how we assess risk and balance our desire for justice with scientific and legal ambiguities about establishing causes and assigning blame. Horowitz is better at raising such questions than answering them, largely because in her case the truth does not come out, the public and even people involved in the litigation begin to lose interest, and no lawsuits have come to trial, let alone been resolved. That doesn't make for very satisfying reading, but it's faithful to a time in which, as Horowitz says, even our will to do right by our communities has been contaminated by competing desires. (July) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist: At her thirtieth reunion, Horowitz was astonished to learn that so many of her former classmates had cancer. Oil wells under the town of Beverly Hills and the highly regarded high school were apparently the cause. She had some difficulty getting access to documents because of ongoing lawsuits initiated by famed environmental activist Erin Brockovich. Still, Horowitz draws on interviews with cancer specialists, geologists, toxicologists, and former teachers and classmates to relate an amazing story of environmental hazard in one of the nation's most storied towns, proof that it can happen anywhere. For years students had been living with oil-tinged clothing following workouts on the athletic fields, with oil pumps looming in the background. But town residents, enjoying royalty checks and the tony image of their community, refused to connect the presence of oil pumps and rising reports of cancer in their youth. Horowitz chronicles the residents' range of emotions, from anger and denial to shame at having done so little to protect their children, as she examines the role of money, image, and continued uncertainty in a community grappling with environmental hazards. Bush, Vanessa: About the Author: Joy Horowitz is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Harpers Bazaar*, and *Time*, among other publications. She is a graduate of Harvard and the Yale Law School.