



My City Was Gone: One American Town's Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band of Locals, and a \$700 Million Day in Court

By Dennis Love



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Powerful and important, *My City Was Gone* is the cautionary tale of how a hardworking small town was destroyed by the very forces that created it. Anniston, Alabama, was once a thriving industrial hub, home to a Monsanto chemical plant as well as a federal depot for chemical weapons. Now its notoriety comes from its exceptionally high cancer rate—some 25 percent above the state norm—and the town's determined citizens who joined together and struck back at the corporation.

As provocative and timely as *Erin Brockovich* or *A Civil Action*, *My City Was Gone* is a magnificently told true story of ordinary citizens in a small Southern town who led a legendary fight against corporate pollution and wrongdoing.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Anniston, Ala., where decades of PCB contamination from a Monsanto chemical plant led to a massive lawsuit and a \$700 million settlement—twice the celebrated "Erin Brockovich" payout—is also where journalist Love grew up. Love's retelling of this toxic tort saga—and an unrelated battle between environmentalists and the Pentagon over a plan to incinerate chemical weapons at a local army depot—also tries to outdo the movie *Erin Brockovich* in drama, flamboyant characterizations and feisty populism. Almost every participant in the tussle gets an overdrawn profile—"David Baker was back, baby"—and almost every development gets ominously foreshadowed ("there was something out there on the edge of town that had scared these Monsanto folks half to death"). Thrown in are lengthy musings on the town's history and troubled race relations—most of the Monsanto plaintiffs were from Anniston's poor, mostly black West Side—and the author's idyllic childhood there. The space given to extraneous human interest would have been better used filling out the author's sketchy, inadequate exposition of the science behind the competing environmental, medical and legal claims. (Aug. 15)

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From [Booklist](#)

Award-winning reporter Love grew up in Anniston, Alabama, the home of a Monsanto chemical plant and a military depot for chemical weapons. That combination proved lethal to the residents of the once--thriving industrial town, as dangerous levels of chemicals dumped in nearby waterways and on land produced alarming levels of cancer and death, eventually creating a ghost town. Love explores the economic and social forces that led to lawsuit settlements that exceeded those in the Erin Brockovich case, attracting legal heavyweights, including Johnnie Cochran, and highlighting modern corporate and military environmental villainy. To tell his compelling story, Love focuses on three townspeople: David Baker, a black man with union-organizing experience who led the charge against the polluters; Chip Howell, the white mayor who tried desperately to weigh environmental against economic interests of the town; and Love himself, the native son whose early memories of the town he could never forget provide compelling background to a dramatic story of the vulnerability of small towns to economic enticements that put their residents' health and lives at risk. *Vanessa Bush*

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About the Author

Dennis Love began his writing career at the *Anniston Star*. He has also worked as a reporter for numerous publications, including the *Los Angeles Daily News*, *Buzz*, the *Sacramento Bee*, and the *Arizona Republic*. He has won the national prize for commentary from the American Association of Sunday Newspaper Editors as well as seven Associated Press News Writing awards and two Best of the West awards. The coauthor of the book *Blind Faith*, he lives in Sacramento, California.

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