

TESTIMONY OF

ANNE HILLIS

BEFORE THE

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES & CHEMICAL WASTE

ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE TASK FORCE ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

AT

NIAGARA FALLS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER

NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK

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My name is Anne Hillis. My testimony today, before the New York Standing Committees, basically is the same testimony I gave in Washington on March 28, 1979 before Senate Subcommittees on Environmental Pollution and Resource Protection. Mr. James Clark and I testified before the Subcommittees chaired by Senator Edmund S. Muskie and Senator Clulver.

I have been honored by Senator Muskie quoting from my testimony in a speech on April 2, 1979 in Boston, Massachusetts before the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Now I will "quote" from Senator Muskie and the part of my testimony that he used.

* * *

"Until recently, this nation's attitude toward hazardous chemicals has been "out of sight, out of mind".

We are paying a price for that philosophy. Poisonous chemicals buried years ago are oozing back to the earth's surface at an alarming rate -- in every region of the country.

Names like "Love Canal", "Valley of the Drums", and "Toone, Tennessee", have become synonymous with pain, suffering and the shabby management of industrial waste.

In the Senate last week, we held hearings on some of these incidents. Witnesses presented sad commentaries on just how tragic lives can be when living near seeping chemicals.

One woman who has lived by Love Canal for more than 13 years testified. Her account was dramatic and penetrating. Occasionally it is useful to recount personal testimony, because it illustrates the real human damage that occurs from unsafe practices. Let me share with you some excerpts from her story:

"My name is Ann Hillis. I am a wife, a mother, I live in Niagara Falls, New York. I also live close to a 'dump'. A dump called Love Canal. I don't want to live there anymore. I hate Love Canal, I hate my life at Love Canal. It's a strange life that I lead now, it is filled with disruption, frustrations, sleepless nights and a grip of fear that only those in similar situations can understand. . . .We've lived in the home for 13½ years. We lost a child there. My 10 year old son went to 99th Street School, as did other children in the neighborhood, some of those children are gone now after the August, 1978 emergency was declared by. . .President Carter.

* * *

"I want to tell you about my son. As I said before, he's 10, he's a bright boy, he has a 91 average in school, as a baby he never required much sleep, he was put on a sedative at about age 7 months to about 18 months, he developed rashes, frequent bouts of diarrhea and respiratory problems -- always respiratory problems....When we became aware of Love Canal, my son went into a depression, withdrawing, from the school, and his mother and father -- he begged to leaveI promised, we would leave soon!....

* * *

"One night last winter I got up to go to the bathroom -- I looked in on him, his bed was empty. I looked all over, it was 2:00 a.m. I heard a cry from under the couch, my son was under there with his knees drawn up to his chin, crying. I asked him to come out, and what was wrong. His reply, "I want to die, I don't want to live here anymore -- I know you will be sick again and I'll be sick again'."

That was powerful testimony. Cases like this have taught us an important point.

We have learned the hard way, that like nuclear waste, we have never really disposed of hazardous chemicals -- we have only stored them. Our new awareness of the hazards of poisonous chemicals in the environment has taught us that the threat of contamination will only disappear when the waste itself becomes harmless.

* * *

Further quotes from Senator Muskie:

"No longer is the Federal Treasury an easy piggy bank to be cracked open whenever people are threatened by pollution. The doer of the harm must be the payer of the bill. Industry will have to abide by a "cradle to grave" management system of waste. There is a growing national consensus that industry should pay the cost of clean up and damages of chemical contamination."

"Anyway we look at it, the cost of cleaning up and managing hazardous chemicals and waste will not be cheap."

"But then, we have already paid dearly for not managing chemical wastes in the best manner available."

"Ten years ago, disposing of hazardous waste did not seem to be a problem. Industry was advised to bury it. Today, government has become more responsive to the safety of our citizens because we have become more sophisticated about what dangerous chemicals can do.

"It would be a shame if the nation refuses to recognize the Doctor Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde of its technological capabilities.

"It would be a shame not to recognize the legitimate government interest in public health and safety.

End of quotes.

Yes, it would be a shame. A shame to leave the people in the Love Canal area. My family, all the other families there living in that contaminated hell. It would be a shame to leave them there any longer.

I will end my testimony with this that I wrote on April 29, 1979.

It, my soul, is ripped. It's being torn
apart! It hears the crying out,
It feels the anguish. The souls of so
many babies. "Redemption" is their shout,
I cry my tears. I beg my release
tiny souls made to stop.

In mothers womb, the chemicals came,
Our own inadequacy we did blame,
Now we know, the Corporate Murderers,
When their souls do pass,
The tiny ones, I pray with silence,
It will say "hush my own tiny one"
"God" is having his day.

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Love Canal Homeowner's
Association, Research
Committee