



Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation

Dan Fagin

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation

Dan Fagin

Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation Dan Fagin

For the readers of *A Civil Action*, *The Emperor of all Maladies* and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*; *Toms River* melds hard-hitting investigative reporting, a ripping scientific detective story, deep historical research and an unforgettable cast of characters into a riveting narrative that will leave readers asking, could it happen in my town, too?

On a cool September day in 1971, an independent trucker with a history of legal scrapes flung open the double doors of his eighteen-wheeler and began tossing leaky drums of industrial waste onto the sandy soil of a rundown chicken farm in Toms River, New Jersey. Eight years later, a schoolteacher who lived four miles away gave birth to a boy whose cherubic smile belied the fast growing tumors that soon riddled his face and chest. The doctors predicted he would not reach his first birthday. They were wrong, but that was only one of many surprises that would eventually come to light in *Toms River*, culminating in 2001 with a record legal settlement believed to top \$35 million and an unprecedented government study confirming the existence of a long-suspected cluster of childhood cancer linked to polluted water and air.

A detective story rooted in a scientific quest thousands of years old, *Toms River* is a tale of dumpers at midnight and deceptions in broad daylight, of corporate avarice and government neglect, and of a few brave individuals who would not keep silent.

Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation Details

Date : Published March 19th 2013 by Bantam (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9780553806533

Author : Dan Fagin

Format : Hardcover 560 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Science, History, Environment, Politics

 [Download Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation Dan Fagin

From Reader Review Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation for online ebook

Barbarakingsley Singer says

It's rare that you can find a non-fiction book that's 560 pages long and find it so compelling that you can't put it down. I previously had little interest or involvement in environmentalism, but this book put me on the road to awareness.

It tells of the chemical companies and other industries in Toms River, New Jersey, USA that purportedly polluted the river, ocean and air that the residents drank, swam in and breathed. The author follows histories of some of the residents who suffered and grew ill as a result of these companies being in Toms River, but he gives the information in such a readable and compelling way that this book can easily be read by a layman, or someone who likes a really good story.

Of course the whole theme and consequences of the situation that occurred is sad and makes the reader angry, but it's something that I can highly recommend as an educational book that not heavy reading at all (despite its 560 pages!) We should all be aware of the fragility our planet, and this book gives the reader a good shake and makes them aware of how easily anyone might suffer because of a possible paid-off bureaucrat or a company that was run without concern for the future of the human race.

Eileen says

I have lived in Toms River twice – first while in high school, from 1984-1989, and it is my current residence since 2000. When my family originally moved to New Jersey in 1984, we lived not too far from where the first break in the Ciba-Giegy pipeline occurred. The story Fagin tells is the background story of my high school and college years. Many of the players he mentioned are real people to me - Bill McVeigh was my history teacher in high school and the ex-navy seal who owned a dive shop in town whose advice was sought after by the Greenpeace disrupters was the father of one of my brother's closest high school buddies. While doing some student teaching in a Toms River elementary school located in the core zone, there was a young girl in that class 6th grade class with leukemia – we knew people in town who had young kids with cancer. The book doesn't say, but Bill McVeigh, the Toms River High School East history teacher who lived on Cardinal Drive (which backed up to Ciba-Giegy's property) also died prematurely from cancer a few years ago, at far too young an age.

As a resident of this town, Fagin's book rings resoundingly and disturbingly true to me and my memory of the events as they unfolded. Small town politics mixed with corporate greed and people who knew if they lost that job at Ciba that there wasn't much else in town with a comparable earning potential made for a perfect storm – just the right combination for good people to look the other way or stop asking hard questions. Ciba was the big bad wolf, but more disturbing to me, actually, was the Reich Farm site, which I don't recall getting the same press and which caused far more pollution and contamination for a considerably longer period of time, with absolutely no regulation. That Furnicola never paid a dime of the \$40/day he told the Reich's he'd pay them to allow him to store the waste drums on their property is par for the sad and disturbing course of the story. Definitely not the kind of thing one wants the hometown to be famous for. That research is so cumbersome and so expensive to conduct on cluster cancers (and I suspect a potential link to an area Autism cluster as well), is beyond frustrating to me as a community member. The truth is out there, and it's always complex. Always. Too expensive or too cumbersome is a b.s. excuse to keep turning a blind eye, and not looking at the NUMEROUS locations where similar events have occurred, because, it's just too hard and too expensive to prove, and the corporations have way deeper pockets to obfuscate than the

general public does.

I would recommend this to anyone who lives in Toms River, or in an area where you suspect disease due to industrial waste teratogens. Fagin's research is excellent and his attention to detail was well appreciated by me. He discusses complex medical and statistical issues, but does so in a way that makes them understandable and relatable. The story of how the offending chemicals were discussed, how their production evolved, and why they were so in demand, along with the historical exploration of how we've come to our current understanding of how cancer occurs, were also very well done.

Alison says

I wanted to much to like this book and give it a higher review. After all, I grew up 30 miles south of Toms River, so the events took place in my area of reference. I am also very into clean air and water and get almost personally offended when I read about how callously we've treated the Earth and one another in pursuit of the almighty dollar.

I wanted to like this book, but I just couldn't.

Dan Fagin certainly tried his best to tell the story as objectively and honestly as possible, but the ending and overall resolution just felt like such a let-down after investing so much time and effort into the narrative. I understand that as a non-fiction book, the facts are the facts and that's it, but at times Toms River: A Small Town, a Cancer Cluster, and the Epic Quest to Expose Pollution's Hidden Consequences got so bogged down in minutiae and obscure facts/chemicals/history that it made it hard to focus on the story at hand. Science and math are also not strong suits of mine, so I struggled with fully understanding the hard-core statistics and also chemical compositions that Fagin spent so much time writing about. I don't want to feel dumb when I read a book, especially since I am far from dumb.

I went back and forth about the rating of this book. If Goodreads would allow me to give half stars, I would have given it 2.5. I think Fagin truly did try to make the book engaging and emotional as possible, but it just didn't work for this reader. 2 stars.

Helga Cohen says

This Pulitzer Prize winning book of 2014 was extremely hard hitting. It dealt with the pollution from well-known chemical companies and how their pollutants caused cancer. Leukemia and neuroblastoma especially in children which was caused by industrial waste teratogens.

Fagin discusses the history of Toms River, the plant, its employees, its citizens and the history of industrial waste disposal, environmental safeguards and the history of epidemiology, cancer and cancer research and treatments. This is the basis of what happened at Toms River.

It involved the companies Ciba-Geigy now owned by Dow Chemical and nearby Union Carbide now also owned by Dow Chemical and their corporate greed and small town politics. Even though pollution went on for decades, for many years little was done about it. The people who worked at the Toms River Chemical Plant and the Toms Water Plant needed their jobs. The government didn't want to spend the money to do what needed to be done until they were forced to and there were no regulations at the time. It started when a major dye manufacturer moved into the Toms River Community and the by-products of the dye

manufacturing created pollution and polluted the river and the water table from which the community drew its water supply. And then after some opposition, they built pipelines to the ocean for their waste. Childhood cancers and cancer clusters were found in the area and stiff opposition to the corporations arose. This eventually led to major investigations, lawsuits and the companies closing after the sites became Super Fund sites which are still undergoing some cleanup. The manufacturing of dyes and other products has been moved to China where the author made a visit and found that China is now seeing an upsurge of cancer clusters and massive pollution. And to those who want jobs returned back to this country, we don't want those kinds of jobs and the harm they cause to individuals and the environment. This book deserved the Pulitzer Prize and I recommend it anyone who wants to understand how epidemiology arose and how cancer was caused by industrial waste.

Emily says

First and foremost, I loved the way this book was written and the way it just delves right into the history of the town in which this story takes place. I appreciate the way Fagin gives you all of the surrounding facts you could possibly want or need throughout the book - about every aspect of this story. I wouldn't say that every book needs this or that I would want this with any book - but the writing is superb and keeps you reading.

As the book progresses, I was finding myself just getting angrier and more appalled with each page I read. You obviously hear about these types of things happening, but having it explained in such excruciating detail was hard.

I found the parts of the book that go into the history of cancer research especially fascinating. My mother is a childhood leukemia survivor, and being diagnosed in the 70s, was one of the lucky ones. The progression in how this disease was classified and understood has always been interesting to me, so I liked that that was focused on so specifically throughout the book.

This book for me (view spoiler)

When getting into the (view spoiler)

Overall, learning about (view spoiler) When I picked this book up at the store, I was shocked at how huge and daunting of a read it seems to be. I'm not sure what is preventing me from giving it that 5th star - it was truly a great book. But I would absolutely encourage anyone to read this. It is a very detailed example of one town's environmental and medical issues, but I think it speaks volumes to how we all currently treat our environment, and how we should.

Donna says

Very powerful book about years of chemical waste causing water and air pollution in Toms River, NJ, and the local residents who were diligent about demanding answers.

The author did a great job of pulling in what had been done historically in cancer research to influence what happened here.

Not always an easy read, but a shocking and sobering story,

Tom says

A friend who teaches philosophy has a course in business ethics. I thought this was an oxymoron until he explained that business ethics have a set of values to which corporations attempt to adhere. Those values are simply put, to maximize returns to investors. Within such a framework when decisions need to be made the choice that maximizes profits will be taken. Because corporations have the same rights as people, some have compared their behavior to psychopathic personalities...void of compassion. . In many scenarios, the benefits accrue to the few and the risks are borne by the many. Hence, the need for some regulations to ensure that the pursuit of corporate profits doesn't harm others. Regulatory organizations, for their part, may a) overshoot and become an impediment to innovation and productivity, b) under regulate and allow harm to occur. In the events described in this book, corporations behave pretty much as they always do and the regulators failed in their role.

Tom's River describes a community in New Jersey that was a sleepy place until a major chemical manufacturer moved operations from Ohio, where the by products of dye manufacturing created pollution, to set up a new, and bigger factory on the banks of a slow moving river. This brought jobs and prosperity to the area, but also polluted the river and the water table from which the community drew its water supply. Subsequent increases in childhood cancers...cancer clusters, aroused stiff opposition to the corporation. Local and state health authorities chose to minimize the risks. There occurred a split in the community between those who worked at the factory, homeowners who had seen a rise in their property values and those families that were convinced that pollution had caused cancers in their children. Enter politicians who wanted whatever publicity they could get from the situation and you can begin to understand how fractious it became.

Clear descriptions of the history of chemical engineering, dye manufacturing, the beginnings of epidemiology and cluster analysis, public health all interwoven with the story of this community makes this an outstanding book. It certainly deserves to be nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Sarah says

Dense, horrifying, and very thought-provoking. Fagin interweaves the history of dye manufacturing and its subsequent industrial waste problem, the birth of epidemiology, and the unfortunate intersection of these fields with Toms River, NJ as he charts the course of sickness and cancer among town residents. Due to the lackadaisical approach taken by both Ciba-Geigy and Union Carbide with regards to their industrial waste disposal, Toms River is bombarded by toxic chemicals that endanger its residents -- all so that the companies can save a few bucks and put off investing in proper treatment of waste materials.

It is both infuriating and amazing to read, because Fagin pulls off quite the feat in balancing various pieces to tell this story. Having done meticulous research, he seeks to explain why Toms River's children were more at risk for certain types of cancer and the results (or lack thereof) of cancer cluster studies done on the town. At times bogged down by very small details, *Toms River is nevertheless an important book that opens the reader's eyes to the grave environmental atrocities committed in the name of profit. And it's also a devastating portrait of a short-sighted society that sacrifices its own well-being for short-term gain.*

Jeanette says

This is length and depth. The message is important. But the means of telling this long and murky report is like a stream that has to traverse all 5 continents. And the North Pole.

Because this wasn't just a detailing for the dye works in Toms River, but a history of testing, the chemical components or derivatives, all the legacy/background for the scientific methods for epidemiology (not only for bacterial, but for all kinds of mutative or parasitic health issues in populations as well).

You are not only getting the story of a pollution into ground water, wells and stats for a cancer cluster - but also centuries of back story to the cause/effect knowledge along the way.

Dan Fagin does a great job on the research, the voices, the testimonies for dire and horrific health outcomes. And for the legal aspects and popular attentions and ignoring that cycled in waves for 30 years from the time that the Toms River Dye factory opened until it closed.

The parts on the waste disposal to the Reich's Farm and the methods of barreling and trucking out into dumps were also thorough.

So why not more than 3 stars? Because it covered so much and for so long that the format and flow became nearly loss. I could absolutely "put it down". The last quarter was a slog- put I plodded on. Tracts of chemical analyzing data describing compound changes in the factory processed. And page after page of by product color quality or benzidine contact result to the bladder cancers- that kind of material for this length of copy is quite difficult to read.

It was interesting and seemed 5 star accurate. I just wish I could have grasped the entire more than I did. Because I actually do understand some of the chemistry. But this was like studying the entire history of France to learn about beret manufacturing or champagne production.

nicole says

Fagin lays out a clear case of the corporate and government decisions that led Toms River to develop a suspected childhood cancer cluster. While I was not a fan of the pacing, the way in which the story kept moving back in time to discuss different topics such as dying methods, diagnosis methodology, and the like, I could not help getting caught up in his research. I grew up in New Jersey during the time period in which this could-be-but-not-quite childhood cancer cluster occurred and that makes this story so much harder to process.

His findings are upsetting, troubling, and very well told. It is disgusting to see how decades of corporate greed and poor ecological decisions are covered up again and again in the town after town. I am aghast at the way in which the local, state, and national authorities let the people of this region down and yet refuse to acknowledge the connection between the rise of these specific illness and decades of inaction. I am flabbergasted at how the company is allowed to change its name to protect its image and move on from city

to city, now country to country, never changing its practices so long as there is another place that won't regulate them properly.

It amazes me how the decisions made by the parties discussed in this book seem to go against the grain of common sense and basic decency. To contract with a farm, never actually pay them the \$40 promised in exchange for permission to dump waste that will contaminate their land and render it useless forever, that contains toxins no one was testing for because they did not know they existed, toxins that will eventually taint the water pregnant women drink and cause cancer in their children that no scientist will ever be safely able to correlate, except for girls between a certain set of age and with a certain sort of cancer, which doesn't include children who actually had that cancer because some died of a different cause because of a terminology issue. That the water company people relied on after their wells were deemed too contaminated to be used was actually aware they were provided water laced with a different toxin, which they thought they fixed by choosing a cost effective treatment that was known to be less effective than the method of treating the water they didn't want to pay for.

And that at the end of the day, after fines, legal fees, and regulation changes, no one was really held accountable for their actions. Most government agencies will not continue costly research into cancer clusters, as the evidence that is found is never certain enough to say what a cause was one way or another, especially at a time when budgets are being sliced to the bones and there are other, more essential areas for taxpayer funds. That there are families in China who are now experiencing what those families in Toms River did, the agony of your child's illness, the medical costs that rack up, the craziness you must feel as the company that is directly causing this tells you they had nothing to do with it.

Hard to read, emotionally and mentally, but worth it none the less.

Siobhan says

Growing up in New Jersey in the late 1980s, I always knew that something had gone on in Toms River: a lot of kids had cancer; that when I visited family members in the surrounding shore towns, we would only drink bottled water; and years later in college, I made friends with individuals who had grown up in Toms River who had believed that they had suffered ill effects from events that had occurred (whether they did or not, I don't know). While I had known the gist of what had happened (chemical plant, nuclear plant, water pollution), I hadn't known any of the details. Thankfully, now I do.

To the best of my memory, I have never not been able to put a work of nonfiction down during bedtime reading, until this title. The 400+ pages of text are full of pertinent (though occasionally seemingly tangential -- it's not) information about the history of epidemiology, and dye and industrial chemical manufacturing. This history is mixed with a well-written and suspenseful narrative following the lives of Toms River residents affected by childhood cancers, employees of the chemical company, involvement from Greenpeace, and the employees of government agencies who, if not for a string of fortuitous events, might never have conducted any investigations. It's well-researched (the footnotes sent me on more than one late-night citation-chasing binge), well-written, and for residents of New Jersey (or anyone living in proximity to an industrial waste or superfund site, or familiarity with environmental public health), it leaves a disappointing conclusion that is all too likely to occur again if we do not all work hard to prevent it. Highly recommended.

Dianne says

I wrote my review, reflecting my intense response to this book. I managed to lose it. condensed version:

Dan Fagin has put together a history of the horrors and inhumanity of corporate greed and government lack of involvement. His work is backed up by pages and pages of references at the end, all of which point to the causes of the devastation of the families and the lethal pollution of the area in and around Toms River, New Jersey. His work is painfully eye-opening and should be included as an educational tool in schools.

The author started at the very beginning, the 'creation' of a process using certain chemicals to make dye. He follows and documents the trail of a large corporation as they use deceit to hide the environmental havoc they caused. The government always seemed to be one step behind, or not interested/informed, enlightened enough to get involved.

Was this book well-written? Definitely. Did this book affect me? Definitely. Did it open my eyes? Definitely. Should it be read by all? Definitely. I'm not sure I agree with the title: "Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation" The word 'salvation' just doesn't sit right with me. No amount of monetary compensation to those whose lives were decimated by various cancers can alleviate the guilt of those responsible. It will not bring back those whose lives were cut short nor ease the pain of those who still live. The affects of the acts of these corporations are much more far reaching than just Toms River and people need to be aware and get involved.

This ARC edition was provided by NetGalley and St. Martin's Press in exchange for my honest review.

Leslie says

I was both fascinated and horrified by this well-researched account of big business putting profit before the health of humans, all living creatures and the environment.

This is a story of corporate greed and government indifference. Government on all levels — state, local and federal — were complicit. It was all business as usual with no thought about the consequences of dumping toxic chemical waste into the water or burying it in ground. Even more disturbing, the local water company knew about the chemicals polluting the drinking water and didn't do anything about it. They hid the information from the residents so they wouldn't have to close any of the wells and cause a water shortage.

When an unusually high number of cancer cases began to show up in Toms River, people began to ask questions but found that getting answers was not going to be easy. A few courageous individuals persevered working tirelessly to overcome government and corporate secrecy and uncover the truth.

The author has done extensive research in compiling this story of the people of Toms River and their decades long struggle to end the pollution and bring justice to the many families whose lives were impacted. Merged into their story is also the history of Toms River, a look back at the origin of the chemical dye industry, and the science behind it.

At times I wished I had paid more attention in chemistry class because there is a lot of compelling scientific

information in this book; however, not having a complete understanding the chemical reactions will not take away from the story. The science emphasizes the seriousness and the gravity of the situation the people of Toms River were facing and there is a fascinating human interest story in between the big words.

Expertly narrated by Dan Woren, the audio production was a pleasure to listen to. Good pacing and clear pronunciations, even all those scientific terms, made the 18+ hours pass by quickly. Even though this is a detailed and at times complex story, I highly recommend the audio version.

In the end, the families did get some compensation, but not without reservations. Ultimately the corporations moved their factories to China, and the pollution and environmental harm continues. Again, don't be scared off by the science, this is also a human interest story and one that affects all of us and the planet we live on.

Chris says

When victims of the same rare cancer live in the same neighborhood, it's tantalizing to think an environmental villain is at play. But it's almost fantasy to believe one will be found, let alone convicted.

That's one of the many lessons from the childhood cancer cluster that haunted the New Jersey town of Toms River, the subject of a new book by journalist Dan Fagin.

Despite enormous costs and efforts, health investigators have never determined the cause in any of the hundreds of residential cancer clusters examined in the United States since 1960. They haven't even identified likely culprits, but for two highly publicized exceptions. The Toms River cluster is one of them.

At least 69 children in the seaside community developed leukemia or brain tumors in the late 1970s through 1990s. Some died. Health investigators, egged on by parent activists, eventually determined that most of the victims lived in the parts of town that were most exposed to the toxic wastes – via drinking water and polluted air – of two large chemical plants.

In the other exceptional case, investigators linked a 1970s outbreak of childhood leukemia in Woburn, Mass., to industrial contaminants in the city water supply. The liability lawsuit brought by victims' families against Beatrice Foods and W.R. Grace inspired the acclaimed book-turned-movie thriller, *A Civil Action*.

Toms River is not written in a made-for-the-movies way. Rather, it's a blend of equal parts narrative and context. Rich primers on the history and science of environmental health investigations are woven throughout the story at all the right places, like well-placed streetlamps.

Fagin's exploration is as enlightening as it gets in the murky world of cancer clusters. It's also courageous. Few journalists dare to drill deep into suspect clusters for much the same reasons health authorities are loath to investigate them. They are fraught with ambiguity, highly nuanced, extremely time-consuming and always inconclusive.

Fagin explains why, in the cold eyes of science, the perceived "cluster" almost always dissolves into statistical insignificance. But, impressively, he also shows the limits of that science.

To analyze disease patterns, health scientists rely on tumor registries that track cancer diagnoses and deaths statewide. But the method is not scientifically valid at the community level. The population of Toms River –

roughly 90,000 in 2000 – is too small for scientists to tell whether a higher-than-expected incidence of like cancers is a fluke or a real “cluster” – one unlikely due to chance – meriting on-site investigation. But that didn’t stop New Jersey officials from telling Toms River residents their cancer rates were not unusual – no worries.

“A clever political solution – and a scientifically illegitimate one,” says Fagin, a veteran investigative reporter who teaches science and environmental reporting at New York University.

Though science-oriented, Fagin’s account sharply illustrates the power of grassroots activism and the importance of the bedrock federal pollution-controls laws enacted in the 1970s.

Activist parents working their social connections drove the cluster investigation more than science and evidence. The drama culminated in 2001 when some of the families of cancer victims won a multimillion-dollar settlement against Ciba-Geigy (formerly Toms River Chemical Co.) and Union Carbide and the local water utility.

For 25 years, the fast-growing chemical manufacturers profited by using the town’s namesake river as a sewer and secretly burying their toxic wastes in the sandy soil – eventually contaminating municipal wells. State pollution enforcers knew, but said and did nothing. The local water utility knew, but took no action and left its customers in the dark.

Ciba-Geigy didn’t build a modern lined landfill or treatment plants until the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency came to town. The EPA also blew the lid off of the drinking water contaminants.

Toms River is scholarly, but it is not an academic tome. For all the science and government agencies the author navigates, the writing is blessedly fluid, unassuming and unblemished by acronyms. And Fagin’s investigative what-did-they-know-and-when-did-they-know-it approach gives the industrial poisoning of Toms River its due in public outrage and corporate disgrace.

Emily Crow says

A book about "corporate avarice and government neglect"--doesn't that sound familiar? The city of Toms River, New Jersey, suffered decades of pollution from toxic waste both from a large chemical company and an illegal dumpsite. This book chronicles the long struggle as many members of the community noticed a large number of children with cancer and tried to get the government to investigate and clean up the problem. In addition, there is a lot of fascinating background information about coal tar processing, the history of epidemiology and occupational medicine, the limitations of statistics in investigating environmental illnesses, etc. I was riveted from the first page until the end, and it would recommend it to everyone. Even if you're not interested in environmental issues and medical investigations, sadly this story is relevant to far more places than one corner of New Jersey. One of the best books I've read this year.

Mike says

Toms River is essential reading for those who care about health, the environment, and the frustration and rights of those injured by industrial hubris. As a professor of Environmental History I would consider this a book that is essential reading.

Like Love Canal and other incidents around the world - Bhopal for instance which was caused by the same industry and same business, we find the rights of the individual trampled in the rush for jobs and economic salvation.

Of course short term gains in economic growth and jobs is often offset by long term loss - in this case destruction of ground water, cancer in the citizens who are caught unawares because state agencies that are supposed to monitor health and environmental issues are appointed by politicians who are beholden to the donations and lobbyists of industry.

Like Erin Brockovich and Lois Gibbs, we can now add the persistent Linda Gillick the pantheon of environmental heroes who stood up to ridicule, the callous who think that cancer is their problem, chambers of commerce, and corporation lawyers to fight for a cause that is more important than all the "good" the company does.

In the end, politics and agencies fail us and we continue with issues like global warming and severe storms, big issues that we as individuals cannot control, but have to endure, not getting the will of the public and the investment needed.

Companies like Ciba-Geigy who created the chemical plant and problems in Toms River change their names to Novartis and move to other places like India and China where regulations are lax and the story does not go away, it just shifts location.

Employees fear for jobs and income - a serious concern - and fight for the company only to find that the company will not fight for them when their own health concerns arise.

The author did amazing research and documentation. He keeps himself and his opinions out of the text and lets the story and complexities play out in a fascinating account that is spell binding and as intriguing as any fictional thriller.

But of course, unlike the fictional thriller, there is not final resolution that will be satisfying, no kick butt public humiliation of the executives - just the reality that we each have a responsibility to act, to support those who are working for the right causes, and to be aware that there are complex issues which take time and some good researchers and lawyers to help us solve.

A highly readable and excellent book.

Lisa B. says

Who knew a book about toxic waste dumping could be such a fascinating read?

By the first 50 pages, I had lost count of the number of times I said "holy crap!". It was hard for me to wrap my brain around the massive quantity of dumping that was going on. I know this was in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the EPA was in its infancy and OSHA was non-existent, but even so, I found it appalling.

The company responsible already had troubles for dumping in one other U.S city and in Europe, so why should things have been any different in Toms River? To me, this is the standard story of a large corporation coming into a small town and hoping that their offerings of good paying jobs would mean the locals would want to overlook any hazards that might be associated with those jobs. As was often the case, the workers and residents were often kept in the dark about their exposure to toxic chemicals and eventually had to fight tooth and nail for information.

What was so interesting about this book was how the author presented the information. Intermixed with the story of Toms River, he educates the reader on topics such as epidemiology, cancer research, cluster studies and so much more. I can't even imagine how much time and effort went into writing this. And while it could have been overwhelmingly scientific, I have to say I felt the information was presented in a very readable and understandable manner.

My thanks to Random House/Bantam and Netgalley for allowing me to read this in exchange for an unbiased review.

Jennifer says

Having grown up in the Toms River area, I was a child when a lot of the whisperings of "cancer cluster" were first heard. So, I was extremely curious to find out more. Fagin does an excellent job of explaining how events unfolded and his particular writing style which included other illustrative historical accountings is effective in helping the layman understand the scientific process. It's hard not to read something like this and become depressed and scared. After all, I still have family who live there and the final update, which is too short in my opinion, does not give me hope that enough has changed. My only reason for not giving the book 5 stars is that the sections detailing the statistical analyses of all of the testing are long and still nearly indecipherable to me (math was never my strong suit). Anyone from Toms River, anyone with an interest in environmentalism, and anyone who just wants to be educated enough to keep their own neighborhoods free from this type of disastrous pollution would do well to read this book.

Meredith says

When I received this book I was not in the mood to read about chemical companies' complete disregard for anything but profits or pollution or cancer. However, it immediately drew me in and I read 134 pages in the first sitting. I've also been compelled to tell everyone I'm in contact with about it.

Fagin's writing and structuring is particularly effective in keeping the book lively and interesting and preventing it from becoming overwhelming. He shifts between the specific history of Toms River, of the plant, its employees, and the citizens, and the history of industrial waste disposal, environmental safeguards, and the history of epidemiology, cancer, cancer treatments and research. The background feeds directly into the issues in Toms River, and each section seemed necessary.

While I find science interesting, it's certainly not a specialist subject, but I didn't feel overwhelmed by the information presented. Fagin writes very clearly, and seems to keep the general audience in mind. For instance, if an acronym hasn't been used for a while he reminds you what it stands for (a move I greatly appreciate). There is a real balance in this book, both in the information reported (epidemiology is rarely

completely obvious and solid) and between telling the scientific story and the human story.

I highly recommend this book, and really can't find anything to criticize. It will be released in mid-March, and I predict a swift rise to the best sellers lists.

Erica says

This book was really good but there was so much information! It was well written and I was excited to learn the history of chemical manufacturing and cancer research, but it is nearly 500 pages and it started feeling like I was at a party trapped in a really long conversation. I'm glad I read it and am shocked by what happened in my hometown, but honestly, it was a struggle to reach the end.
