

Writing Samples

In my career of writing and journalism, I have written about everything from an award-winning series about PCB and heavy-metal contamination in Alabama to a Waffle House wedding.

I've interviewed tornado survivors who have lost loved ones; people who lost everything because of addiction, fire and accidents, people who have viewed visions of The Virgin Mary in a treetop, musicians of all genres, writers, poets, carnival workers, the Claus family, war survivors, Purple Heart recipients, athletes, ballerinas, families, dogs (and their handlers), and more.

My bylines have appeared in Daily Newspapers: The Evansville (IN) Courier, The Anniston (AL) Star and the Clarion-Ledger in Mississippi; the Evansville Courier's county, weekly and bi-monthly publications including: The Warrick Co. (IN) Courier, The Posey County (IN) News, The Newburgh (IN) Register, The Chandler (IN) Post; the Clarion-Ledger's Weekender and Features section, The Clinton (MS) News and The Clinton Courier since 2011.

I have written for trade magazines, including Indiana Business, my first paid freelance story about the oldest pretzel company in Indiana that still hand-twists pretzels in Tell City, using a secret family recipe; I have written for Pizza Today and Catering Today trade magazines, and worked trade shows in Las Vegas.

While working at the Anniston Star, I had a byline story—above the “fold” -- on the front page of every section of an entire Sunday edition, an unlikely goal I set for myself and figured I would never accomplish.

FRONT: I shared a front page above-the-fold News story with the sports editor about the race at Talladega (Dale Earnhardt Sr. won).

FEATURES: My front-page Features story was about Talladega wives that travel with their husbands in luxurious travel trailers, enjoying cold beverages on an outdoor patio while baking a roast for dinner and monitoring their husband's radio frequency.

RELIGION: The front page Religion story featured the traveling church that goes from racetrack to racetrack and was established by racecar driver Jeff Gordon and his former wife.

SPORTS: Wrote an at-the-track story about the people, fans, infield action, etc. And spent time in the pits interviewing racers and crew pit members.

Normally journalists shirk from writing weather stories, however, I loved the challenge to bring life and excitement to a weather story,

One week I led the front page for seven consecutive days with a weather story about predicted snow that never arrived. As the Deep South has no snow removal equipment, people panicked and ransacked the stores, buying everything in sight. I talked to grocers with empty shelves; crazed shoppers; a baker making loaves of bread very early in the morning while a line formed outside; and I interviewed people who remembered the 12 inches of snow that debilitated the city and caused deaths 20 years before.

A fall week in Anniston, when the leaves were at their peak of incredible color, a photographer and I went to a street with a beautiful, huge Chinese Gingko tree, resplendent with color. An elderly woman was pushing a wheeled cart under the limbs of the tree, which formed a brilliant orange-gold arc over the sidewalk. I stopped to chat with her and learned that her neighbors of more than 50 years, both deceased, planted the tree to celebrate when they married and moved into their home, living their whole lives there.

My stories, interviews and articles have appeared in alternative publications such as NEWS4U (Evansville, IN), and music and arts magazine, The Weekly Planet, The Jackson Free Press and The Nashville (TN) News music magazine. My CD and concert reviews have been printed in online and print publications too numerous to remember.

Katherine R. Dougan

PCBS

Junk in the dust



A Solutia field technician takes a sample to determine if excessive levels of PCBs are embedded in the soil. Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

■ Last produced here almost three decades ago, PCBs have uprooted communities and taken a chunk out of the quality of life.

By Katherine R. Dougan
Star Staff Writer

The questions run like a litany, and to the public, it seems no one has answers. What are these chemicals in our water, soil, blood and air? What do they do and when will they leave? How do we live with them, if we must?

The answers about polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, both can and cannot be found in reams of government documents, university and private studies. Each study yields another report, another study.

What's left, frustrated residents and even scientists say, is a lingering sense of uncertainty. "As soon as an individual's health is impacted by an environmental situation, it becomes serious, scary," said Kirsten Bryani, executive director of the Alabama Environmental Council. "It's scary, and there's just so much no one seems to know."

A federal government report released in February found sufficient levels of PCBs in soil in parts of Anniston to present a public health hazard.

The report went on to say that no firm conclusions could be drawn because of incomplete data, however, just the mention of the presence of PCBs was enough to draw more than 500 residents to a public meeting on Feb. 17.

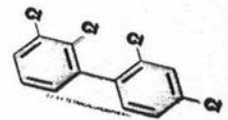
In mid-February the Environmental Protection Agency opened a Superfund office in Anniston, which serves as a base from which soil, water and blood are being collected in the search to define PCB contamination.

PCBs, first brought to public attention when discovered here in fish and creeks in 1993, have become a public enemy.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry hosted the local meeting to explain findings of its health consultation. Most residents, drawn to the meeting out of fear and concern for their health, didn't want to hear speeches — they wanted action. Questions centered on what levels in blood, soil and water were harmful. Experts say those questions aren't easily answered.

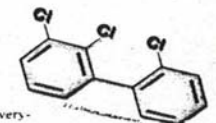
Dr. Rick Canady, senior toxicologist with the ATSDR and the principal author of the health consultation, was cautious about blood data. "One of the things about the state of knowledge about PCBs is we don't really know what level in blood causes health effects," he said.

According to Dr. Robert G. Kaley II, director of Environmental Affairs for Solutia, in the U.S. population every-



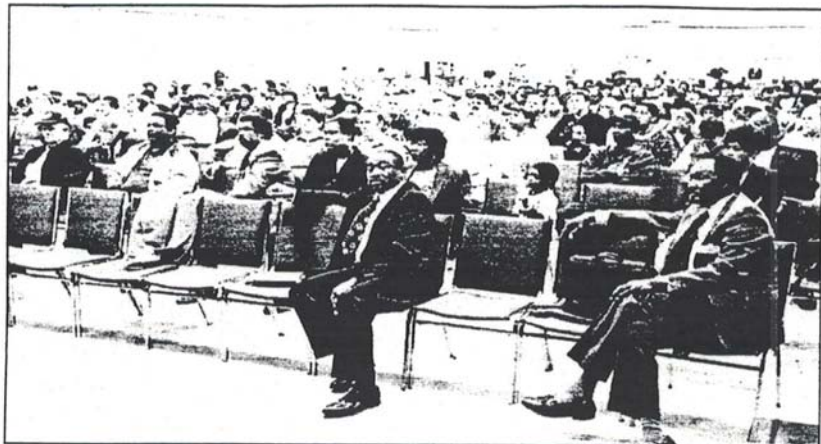
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Please see PCBs
Page 4D

PCBs: JUNK IN THE DUST



A crowd of more than 500 recently attended a public meeting on the effects of PCBs on the community at the Anniston City Meeting Center.

Chemicals in our midst

Here's a brief timeline of Anniston's PCB history.
1993 The Alabama Department of Environmental Management studies contamination of polychlorinated biphenyls in fish tissue tests in Snow and Choccolocco creeks. ADEM determined that PCBs could be coming from drainage ditches leading from the Monsanto plant in West Anniston to Snow Creek.

1994 Monsanto notifies ADEM that the West End Landfill, which had been sold to Alabama Power in the 1960s, had an on-going release of PCBs because the landfill cover had been disturbed during some construction.

September 1994 ADEM gets a report, "West End Landfill — Site Investigation, September 1994." It was the result of several months of studying the landfill. Another study was started to see what could be done to fix the contamination problem.

1995 The Alabama Department of Public Health and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry conducts an exposure investigation in the Cobbtown/Sweet Valley community.
February 1995 The Focused Feasibility Study leads to a redesign of the landfill cover.

April 1995 ADEM negotiates a Consent Order with Monsanto to address possible sources of contamination other than the West End landfill. Monsanto is required to do PCB sampling, which shows that drainage ditches and adjacent residential areas are affected. As a result, Monsanto begins a property buyout and resident relocation program.

May 1995 Redesign of West End landfill cover submitted to ADEM.
September 1995 Monsanto begins recapping the landfill. It takes one year.

October 1995 Upon completion of the first ADPH and ATSDR health consultation, the second investigation into residential exposure begins. ADPH offers blood testing to all individuals who lived or worked in the area and were at least one year old. Twenty-eight of 103 people had high levels of PCBs in their blood.

March 8, 1996 A second Consent Order provides for wider remediation of PCB affected areas. This order was designed to minimize the risk of exposure to people living in near contaminated areas.

January 1997 ADEM signs the permit updating Monsanto's requirements for closing the landfill. It imposes long-term remediation on the company.

April-June 1998 Solutia puts in a revised work plan to investigate more on-site and off-site areas affected. Additional sampling is done, addressing additional investigations of soil, sediment, surface water and ground water possibly affected.

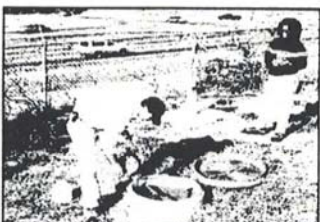
December 1999 Residents, concerned about contamination and their health, meet to discuss PCBs. That leads to the Environmental Protection Agency setting up a local Superfund office about two months later.

February 2000 A federal government report finds PCBs in soil and air samples. Soil in Anniston yards is sampled, and the search for PCBs continues.

Source: Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.



Monsanto notified ADEM that the West End Landfill had an ongoing release of PCBs because the landfill cover had been disturbed during construction.



Solutia Field Techs, Dan Hoadley and Vonda Turman check water below the landfill access from Alabama 202 near Solutia.

Knowledge unlocks mystery of polychlorinated biphenyls

By Laura Tutor

Special Projects Editor

In the world of public information and education, experts say there are few combinations more volatile than the cocktail of health, fear and science. Anniston's current concern over PCBs is kind of like taking gasoline, lacing it with oil and tossing a match on top, researchers and educators familiar with the chemical contamination in West Anniston say. A general public lack of knowledge about science, mixed with anecdotal and some statistical information about PCB-related health problems, has created an atmosphere in which the people who need questions answered the most are almost too afraid — or too angry — to ask.

However, for the public to be served, people to be safe, they must find a way to get past their fear and anger to the information they need to make informed decisions, said Dr. Barbara Slade, senior medical officer of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"The unknowns — and not understanding them — are a big contributor to public fear," said Dr. Doug Rokke, a visiting assistant professor of environmental science and engineering at Jacksonville State University. Even when the public is presented with the information, the language of environmental matters can be overwhelming, he said.

"I can sit there all day long and make some comments, but I might as well be speaking a foreign language," said Rokke, who cited a national survey that estimated only about 4 percent of Americans have an adequate understanding of chemistry, biology, physics and anatomy and physiology.

When people charged with educating the public, such as Dr. Slade, talk to citizens about chemicals, contamination and health effects, often the reaction is outrage and anger. Couple that with phrases including "cancer," "mortality," "low birth-weight," and the fear is hard to contain.

"It's hard to inform them without scaring them," said Dr. Slade, who outlined some of the possible health risks associated with PCBs. "You don't want to get them to think that they have all these health

PCB education

Experts advise residents to educate themselves about PCBs. In addition to public libraries, here are some other possible sources. Although a wealth of information is available on the internet through the World Wide Web, people should know that not all information on the Web is or can be verified, experts said.

- These are some Web sites recommended by people interviewed for this project:
- www.cdc.gov
- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/atsdrhome.html
- www.fda.gov
- <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov>
- www.nature.nps.gov/toxic/index.html
- www.epa.gov
- www.fema.gov
- www.adem.state.al.us
- www.mms.com/db/bookmedic.html

- Copies of the Anniston-PCBs Health Consultation from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry can be found at:
- Anniston Public Library, 108 E. 10th St.
- Carver Library, 722 W. 14th St.
- Community Against Pollution Headquarters, 1012 W. 15th St.
- EPA Community Center, 1313 Noble St.

effects."

Anger and fear cloud a person's judgment and cognitive ability, said Dr. Claudia McDade, a professor of psychology at Jacksonville State University. When enough anger builds up in a group, it spreads to people who would ordinarily be calm, she said.

"It's sort of like charismatic or evangelical religious groups," she said. "One person gets the spirit, and it's contagious."

That spirit is sometimes understandable — and unavoidable — when health is at stake, said Kirsten Bryant, executive direc-

tor for the Alabama Environmental Council. Nothing his folks harbor than telling them their children and grandchildren may get sick. However, she added, there comes a time when the public's venting becomes counterproductive and keeps people from learning what they need to know.

On the heels of ignorance is a general mistrust of the government, Rokke said. From the Tuskegee syphilis studies to the current scandal over faulty chemists, the public harbors a suspicion that the people talking to them are hiding something, and that is why it's important for people to educate themselves. He gets several calls and e-mails a day from people asking the best way to get their own information about health and how chemicals can affect them.

Rokke said that's a valid mistrust, and that is why it's important for people to educate themselves. He gets several calls and e-mails a day from people asking the best way to get their own information about health and how chemicals can affect them.

Ms. Bryant advises groups or individual citizens to develop a list of specific questions. Get those addressed, study the answers, and come back for more information to see how they apply on a personal level. There are also national advocacy groups that have experts who specialize in presenting information in a way the public can understand, she said. If one group of Anniston residents feels it can't sift through the reports stemming from PCBs, it should find a more experienced group that can.

Dr. Slade said it's sometimes more effective for people to get their questions answered one-on-one. That way the expert informing them can tell if they're getting the message across.

Some of the information is "scientifically heavy," said Mollie Freier, coordinator of instructional services at JSU. Public libraries can connect residents with reliable sources of information and help them wander through the maze of studies and reports.

And since research changes quickly, don't rely on items that are too old. Also, if some study or report seems incredible, be skeptical unless similar findings can be found or confirmed from other sources.

A wealth of information is available on the World Wide Web, Rokke and Ms. Freier said. But they caution that much Internet information may not be reliable, so always consider the source.

"All of this stuff gets real difficult for someone to understand," Rokke said. "When people see something they don't understand, it's scary."

Public awareness and where to go to learn about PCBs

Community Against Pollution, or CAP
 Anniston native David Baker organized Community Against Pollution in November 1999. Born in West Anniston, Baker lived away from Anniston for 25 years, before moving back in 1993. In 1998, Baker said he was visiting a lady on Butternut Road who said she was having health problems.

CAP received a \$16,000 grant from the EPA, but needs financial assistance from the public to fund the organization, Baker said. Most of the board members have full-time jobs and volunteer their time. CAP staff members receive a small stipend. In 1998, Baker said he was visiting a lady on Butternut Road who said she was having health problems.

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pany paid about \$1.7 million to relocate the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.

Litigants in suit against Solutia
 Anniston attorney Donald Stewart represents 3,600 litigants in their lawsuit against Solutia. The litigants seek compensation for trespass, damages to their property and personal injuries because of body burdens of PCBs, Stewart said.

"I became involved with the Mars Hill Church in 1995. After that I began to talk to the people," Stewart said. A \$3 million settlement was reached between Mars Hill Baptist Church and Solutia in 1998.

"Medical monitoring is some relief we're seeking. We're seeking punitive damages because of the way in which Monsanto committed acts of negligence or trespass that resulted in the course of contamination of property and people having it (PCBs) in their body. We're seeking injunctive relief, asking that the court prevent future releases of PCBs from the plant site," Stewart said.

After the initial trial date had been set, Solutia petitioned the state Supreme Court with a writ of mandamus, asking the high court "to review certain rulings made here by the trial court judge," Stewart said.

Stewart could make no further comments because of litigation, he said.

U.S. EPA Superfund
 The Environmental Protection Agency administers the Superfund program. Superfund's priority is to elimi-

nate any public danger from hazardous waste sites, said Karen Knight, Anniston's on-site coordinator.

Since Superfund was started in 1980, EPA has conducted more than 3,000 emergency response actions. The Anniston office at 1312 Noble St. is the base for area testing of soil, water and blood for contaminants. The assessment process is two-pronged. Ms. Knight said. The first phase involves taking samples from about 70 areas while also sampling from houses in surrounding areas, north and south of Alabama 202.

Agency for Toxic Substances, Disease Registry
 The ATSDR is a public health division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for preventing or reducing the harmful effects of exposure to hazardous substances. ATSDR advises the EPA as well as other federal and state agencies, community members, and other interested parties on the health impacts of hazardous waste sites and toxic spills.

ATSDR identifies communities where people might be exposed to hazardous substances in the environment. ATSDR conducts studies in some communities at or near hazardous waste sites and toxic spills.

ATSDR educates doctors, other health care professionals and communities about the health effects of hazardous substances and how to lessen exposure.

Alabama Department of Environmental Management
 A 1982 legislative act established the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. ADEM

administers all major federal environmental laws including the Clean Air, Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water acts and federal solid and hazardous waste laws.

Under the Resource Conservation Recovery Act ADEM is responsible for monitoring remediation activities at Solutia.

Alabama Department of Public Health
 Since 1992, the Risk Assessment and Toxicology Branch of the ADPH has received funding from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to determine the public health impact of hazardous chemicals in the environment.

The branch's recent efforts to reduce exposure include recommending fish-consumption advisories and supporting temporary or permanent relocations. The ADPH's Hazardous Substances Emergency Event Surveillance System compiles data on the acute health effects caused by the accidental release of hazardous substances.

— Katherine R. Dougan
 Sources: Environmental Protection Agency; Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry; Alabama Department of Environmental Management; Alabama Department of Public Health; Solutia Director Environmental Affairs Robert G. Kaley II, Ph.D.; Anniston attorney Donald Stewart; CAP; and David Baker, president of Community Against Pollution.

PCBs: JUNK IN THE DUST

Rebuilding community can be long and tedious

By Katherine R. Dougan
Star Staff Writer

It's quieter now than it used to be. Families have moved, churches have relocated, and people who once called part of West Anniston home wonder what's left.

Long after Cobbtown and Sweet Valley stop being communities, the legacy of PCBs produced along Alabama 202 will remain, residents and scientists say. Other communities — ones that have been straddled by chemicals before — say the road back to civic health and wellness can seem endless.

Anniston's trip down that road has just begun.

"The problem's probably a lot larger than we've identified," said Doug Rokke, a visiting assistant professor of environmental science and engineering at Jacksonville State University.

"And what are the implications?"

Cleanup or remediation of PCBs is new to the Anniston area, with costs of remediation hitting \$30 million and rising.

Solutia Inc., formerly Monsanto Co., started remediation efforts in 1995, moving mountains of PCB-free soil atop the plant's old landfill areas, sealing contaminated soil underground, and rerouting water flow from Coldwater Mountain, all in an effort to contain PCBs from migrating into soil and water.

PCBs were produced at the Monsanto plant for nearly 50 years until they were discontinued in 1971.

PCBs were widely used as coolants, insulating materials and lubricants. The United States stopped making them in 1977 because of the health effects associated with exposure. Pre-1977 products may still contain PCBs, which include things like old fluorescent lighting fixtures, electrical transformers or some appliances.

But, Rokke said, PCBs haven't been produced here for years, and yet they're still turning up in the earth and in bodies. That, he said, hinders ill for getting the problem under control. Solving an environmental puzzle, he said, will require a team effort.

The EPA Superfund recently set up an office in Anniston at the request of concerned citizens to conduct soil, blood and air samples and determine whether remediation is needed in a larger geographic area than previous efforts indicated.



Mars Hill Baptist Church, near Alabama 202, sits next to Solutia's retention basin. The church has since moved to another building in west Anniston.

Craig Branchfield, remedial project manager for Solutia, said the company believes corrective measures taken in the Anniston area are the best way to manage these PCBs.

How long does it take to effectively remove or eliminate contamination from an area? Can it be done effectively? And what happens to a community in the process?

"How clean is clean?" is a question Lois Gibbs is asked often, she said. In the comparatively short history of chemical contamination remediation, Mrs. Gibbs has more than 20 years of experience.

She spearheaded the effort which resulted in the cleanup of a 20,000-ton toxic-chemical dump in Niagara Falls, N.Y. Dioxin was the chemical culprit at the Love Canal site, however, it took more than two years to prompt President Jimmy Carter to deliver an emergency declaration which moved 900 families from this hazardous area.

Mrs. Gibbs serves as executive director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, formerly the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, an organization that has assisted more than 8,000 grass-

roots groups with organizing, providing technical and general information nationwide.

CHEJ's efforts have helped groups such as the Housatonic River Initiative get started.

The Pittsfield, Mass.-based Housatonic River Initiative, or HRI, formed in 1992, is a nonprofit coalition of Berkshire County residents working to reclaim the Housatonic River system from neglect and PCB contamination.

A General Electric plant burn facility in Pittsfield contaminated the river and area with PCBs — areas which included residential homes, businesses, schoolyards and playgrounds.

Remediation efforts are still under way in Pittsfield largely because the EPA, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, or DEP, and the General Electric Company are trying to decide how and to what extent the first half-mile of the Housatonic River will be cleaned.

Cleanup efforts in Pittsfield differ from Anniston since removing PCBs from a river is not the challenge.

Contamination from area creeks has been here

and dredged or will be dredged as part of the continued remediation.

Branchfield said.

And contaminated soil in Anniston has either been removed or capped with a layer of geotextiles and clean soil, and topped with a high-density polyethylene. A layer of soil, which varies from 10 to 18 inches depending on the level of contamination, is installed on top of the liner material, then covered with six inches of topsoil and a vegetative cover, Branchfield said.

When dealing with relocation spurred by remediation, CHEJ suggests a commonsense approach. "It's really hard on the people because they're being given choices that aren't really good choices," Mrs. Gibbs said.

Since human risk levels for PCB contamination are not clearly defined, Mrs. Gibbs contends that there is no way to know if current clean standards are really adequate. "PCBs adhere to carpeting, to flooring, to dust. For the most part it's pretty much there and it's not going anywhere," Mrs. Gibbs said.

Often the choices are either move or don't move, without neighborhoods and communities being taken into consideration, Mrs. Gibbs said.

And no one can say for sure whether areas wrecked by chemical contamination ever will be safe places to live again.

Solutia's cleanup efforts included purchasing about 70 pieces of property in west Anniston. In those areas, the communities of Cobbtown and Sweet Valley are gone.

The trauma of relocation is not a new story, but when relocation is necessary, sometimes a workable solution can be reached.

Mrs. Gibbs cites a community in Centralia, Penn., which had an old longwall mine beneath the ground. A fire in the old mine had been burning underground for a long period of time, with houses on the ground above collapsing into the mine shafts.

When it was determined the community needed to be relocated, a plot of land was acquired the same size of the community's previous location.

The whole neighborhood had the choice of moving to a new neighborhood together. "They didn't have to move with the group, but they had a choice," Mrs. Gibbs said.

"It's another way to look at it, whether it's five homes or 50 homes, it's how you do it in a way that people are not losing what they have."

Star Special Projects Editor Laura Tutor contributed to this story.

PCBs: Polychlorinated biphenyls were first discovered in fish and waterways in Calhoun

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body has a little bit of PCBs in their system.

"Background levels are generally considered to be 20 parts per billion or less, maybe even up to 40 parts per billion," Kaley said. "Most of the levels are lower than that; the average is probably 5 to 6 parts per billion."

A part per billion is about the same as a single drop of water in a swimming pool filled with water.

"Nobody has established for any chemical what is considered a safe or unsafe level," said Stephen Lester, science director for the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, or CHEJ, in Falls Church, Va.

"That's part of the issue around these chemicals."

The CHEJ, formerly the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, is a grassroots organization that assists groups in organizing efforts in communities. CHEJ provides technical and general information nationwide about toxic wastes and hazardous chemicals.

"It isn't clear what levels are acceptable, and people aren't being given any answers and are getting very frustrated, very scared," Lester said. "One way I try to help people to understand is to talk about the fact there is no 'natural' level of PCBs in people. Nobody should have PCBs in their blood, tissue or breast milk ... so even when you look at 'normal' levels, there really is no 'normal' level."

Part of the reason the public can't get information is that science doesn't have the answers, Lester said.

Studying the studies

Not many epidemiological studies — human studies — have been done on PCBs simply because of a lack of control groups on which to study.

Epidemiological studies are divided into two categories, morbidity studies, which are studies of human illness, and mortality studies, which are studies of causes of death.

A study from the Center for Environmental and Human Toxicology at the University of Florida in Gainesville, analyzed PCB clinical and scientific reports spanning over 50 years.

"This literature, though extensive, is somewhat fragmented," said the report on the study done by doctors. Findings, compiled by experts from the University of Florida, Baylor College of Medicine, and the University of Louisville, addressed studies which include the liver, lungs, skin, cardiovascular systems, nervous system, certain endocrine systems, the blood/immune system, and the gastrointestinal and urinary tracts.

"After careful analysis, the weight of evidence suggests the only adverse health effects attributable to high, occupational

PCB exposures are dermal."

Dermal effects are the only clear-cut health effects linked to PCB and dioxin exposure.

Chloracne is a skin effect of exposure. The condition resembles severe blackheads, which are usually located in a "C" shaped pattern at the temples, the back of the neck and in the area of the scrotum.

Kaley admits that transient elevations of liver enzymes can arguably be an effect of PCB exposure, but cautions that studies are not consistent.

A study published in 1995 and conducted by Dr. Renate D. Kimbrough of the Institute for Evaluating Health Risks, Washington D.C., and funded by the Institute and the Aluminum Company of America, concludes that doses of PCBs in humans "can only be estimated, while more precise information is available for PCB-fed laboratory animals."

The study further indicates that "In the U.S., in PCB-exposed workers or in the adult general population, the combination of hyperpigmentation, chloracne and discolored nails have never been observed," however, these alterations in skin and nails were identified in subhuman primates following the administration of PCBs.

Two major studies in the United States have examined low-level environmental exposure to PCBs.

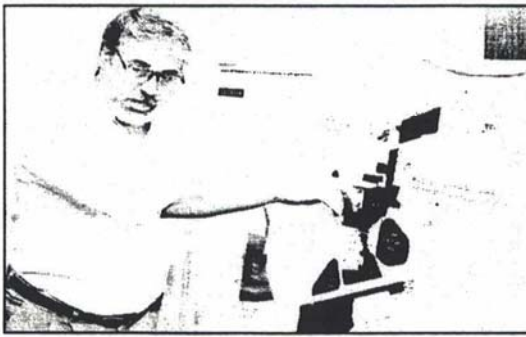
A 1986 study examined the neonatal effects of transplacental exposure to PCBs and DDE, or 1-dichloro-2, 2-bis(p-phenyl)ethylene. Results of this study, which concentrated on prenatal subjects, were published in the Journal of Pediatrics. Although the authors found "no association between birth weight, head circumference or presence of jaundice and levels of the contaminants in any of the biological matrices," they did find elevated PCB levels were associated with hypotonicity. Hypotonicity is a condition of having abnormally low tension or tone, especially of the muscles.

A follow-up study of infants from the original study was tested on Bayley Scale of Infant Development, which is a device used to measure the development progress of infants over the first two-and-one-half years of life. The test consists of three scales: mental, motor and behavior record.

The most comprehensive studies on *in utero* exposure to PCBs have been conducted by Joseph L. Jacobson and Sandra W. Jacobson.

These studies concentrated on infants and children who had been exposed *in utero* to PCBs. The PCBs were present in their mothers' bodies.

The Jacobsons found developmental and cognitive dysfunctions associated with fish consumption and potential prenatal exposure to PCBs.



Dr. Robert Kaley, director of Environmental Affairs for Solutia, points out the area that the company has cleaned up since remediation began.

These studies have been criticized for the small size of the control group studied, the Jacobsons' interpretation of analytical PCB data, and the statistical comparisons of exposed and control subjects.

This criticism addresses a problem with human studies: Scientists are limited in the study of human subjects exposed to PCBs.

Mystery of the people

The lack of conclusive evidence of PCBs on human health effects is precisely why agencies charged with protecting public health tend to err on the side of caution when considering toxic substances and contaminants.

No one is more aware of this problem than Lois Marie Gibbs.

Mrs. Gibbs serves as executive director of CHEJ. She was the organizer of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, a group formed when residents of a Niagara Falls, N.Y., community discovered their homes were built on top of a 20,000-ton toxic-chemical dump.

"What we all believed five years ago or maybe even as little as three years ago about toxicity of this chemical has changed dramatically," Mrs. Gibbs said.

She believes the problem is that the setting of standards has not caught up to the new science and what new science is saying. "Most of the science now is looking at infants, breast-fed babies and *in utero* exposure, specifically to dioxins and PCBs."

How much is too much?

Even though data in the ATSDR's report is tempered with a "high degree of uncer-

tainly regarding exposure point concentrations for soil ingestion pathways," the report said, "PCB levels may range high enough to warrant concern for effects," such as neurodevelopmental and thyroid effects for exposure durations of approximately one year.

Dr. Rick Canady, the ATSDR's senior toxicologist and a principal author of the report, continued: "Because sampling methods are not known for the ... data, there is a fairly high degree of uncertainty regarding exposure point concentrations for soil ingestion pathways."

This analysis leaves unanswered the question of whether the soil is harmful.

Detection of a 50 parts-per-million level of PCBs in soil requires cleanup according to the Toxic Substances Control Act, Kaley said.

EPA soil sample data provided to David Baker of Community Against Pollution, or CAP, in September indicated the highest level of PCBs on property not owned by Solutia was a location on West 10th Street.

The first soil sample indicated a level of 17.74 parts per million.

At this same location, however, a second

sample taken by the EPA revealed a level of 7.325 parts per million.

During Solutia's cleanup efforts, soil was remediated, or cleaned up to a level of 10 parts per million or less.

Lester points out that 50 parts per million is not a number based on health effects, but rather is a number "derived more than 25 years ago that was just a number of convenience."

As an analogy, Lester compares the 50 parts per million in PCBs with the action level of dioxin, which is no greater than 1 part per billion, which is 50,000 times lower. "Many PCBs have dioxin-like activity, so they cause the same types of problems as dioxins," Lester said.

Levels in air and water present many of the same difficulties since the least level affecting human health has not yet been conclusively determined.

Since PCBs tend to cling to organic matter, such as soil, and are not as volatile in water, it stands to reason that levels in water and air are not at the same concentrations as in soil.

"When you have hot summer conditions as you do in Alabama, for example, you're going to have quite a bit in the air and solubility in the water," Lester said.

Air samples taken by both the EPA and Solutia confirm that PCBs are in Anniston air at levels that are above what are seen in other urban settings, Canady said.

However, Canady said, it's not time to worry yet about air levels. "I really do want to find out more about air levels. We've only looked really close at a few places at the Solutia facility. Close enough to look to see if we can find more of it, but not high enough for immediate concern about health," he said.



David Baker, president of Community Against Pollution CAP, helps keep communities informed on PCB contamination in their neighborhoods.

ABOUT THE PCB SPECIAL SECTION AND STORY SERIES

To write this award-winning series, I not only talked to Federal agencies on site, spoke with State agencies in Montgomery, visited scientists at Solutia (Monsanto) in Anniston, but also went door-to-door on foot in neighborhoods where people could not afford telephones. I introduced myself and told them I was writing a series to help everyone understand why people dressed in “space suits,” or protective clothing and masks to prevent contamination, were drilling samples in soil, former business sites and in some cases, front yards

Everyone I spoke to was courteous, kind, and thanked me for trying to help. It remains one of the most wonderful experiences of my journalism career, a true grassroots effort to help those who needed it the most.

Additionally, my series of stories about PCB and heavy metal contamination, public meetings and the special series I wrote resulted in winning multiple state and national awards and a John J. Knight Fellowship in Journalism at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. My series of stories are now part of the curriculum of studies about PCB's and heavy metal contamination in colleges and universities throughout the world.

--Katherine R. Dougan

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Mississippi's News Source

Monday, February 26, 2001 ■ Jackson, Miss. 1

Twisters leave path of death, destruction

■ 9-year-old boy among five killed in Pontotoc County

By Katherine R. Dougan, Theresa Klely and Andy Kanengiser
Clarion-Ledger Staff Writers

PONTOTOC — Evan Nixon died in the midst of his 10th birthday party, one of five people killed when a tornado tore through this

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north Mississippi community, leaving dozens of others injured and more than 1,000 homeless.

His stepdad, digging through the rubble, found him and cradled the dying

boy in his arms.

The five killed in Mississippi Saturday night were among a death toll of 10 that spread throughout the states of Arkansas, Kansas, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Across Mississippi, 509 homes were destroyed or sustained major damage in the storms, according to state and local emergency management officials.

"It took 10 seconds, and

they (homes) were gone," said Leflore County District 5 Supervisor Arvel Burden, reached on his cell phone as he assessed storm damage in his district in Greenwood on Sunday.

"It was rough up in this area," Burden said. "It's devastating to see what it did."

Leflore County had 27 homes destroyed or with major damage, but that

paled in comparison to Pontotoc County, the state's hardest hit with 360 homes destroyed or severely damaged.

With wind speeds peaking at 150 miles per hour, the tornado dropped from the night sky onto a home near the Pontotoc-Calhoun county line in southwest Pontotoc County. The storm traveled northeast,

See STORMS, 4A

Community rallies to comfort victims

■ Some 1,000 residents in need of shelter after storm

By Robert Schoenberger
Clarion-Ledger Staff Writer

PONTOTOC — Sunday morning, as residents of this close-knit town surveyed the damage done by a deadly tornado, one thing was clear — many of their neighbors needed warm meals and roofs over their heads.

Authorities estimate about 360 homes were damaged or destroyed when the twister ripped through northeast Mississippi. Pon-

Rickey Jagers estimated that as many as 1,000 people are without shelter in the area, which is home to about 45,000 people.

But despite the damage, only one person occupied an emergency relief shelter set up Sunday night by the Lee County/Tupelo chapter of the American Red Cross.

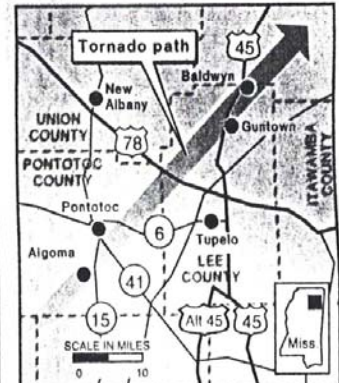
"We're really surprised that there haven't been more people here," said Rebecca Dill, assistant shelter manager for the Red Cross. In fact, a shelter set up late Saturday night by a local church had shut down by Sunday afternoon.

Volunteers with the Red



J.D. Schwalm/The Clarion-Ledger

Barbara Marsh picks through what's left of her kitchen after Saturday's tornado. Her family



Harold Gater/The Clarion-Ledger

FATALITIES IN PONTOTOC

- Betty Clowers, 149 E. 10th St.
- Donnie Clowers, 149 E. 10th St., son of Betty Clowers.
- Michael Seale, 167 E. 10th St., nephew of Betty Clowers.
- Peggy Hester, 142 E. 10th St. These four were in Betty Clowers' home when the storm hit.
- Evan Nixon, 154 E. 10th St., fourth-grader at D.T. Cox Elemen-

Storms: Damage reported in several Mississippi counties

From 1A

never lifting from the ground until it reached the Union county line 23.7 miles away, Pontotoc County Sheriff Leo Mask said.

The five deaths in Pontotoc occurred on East 10th Street on the south side of town.

Killed were Evan of 154 E. 10th St.; Betty Clowers and her son Donnie Clowers, both of 149 E. 10th St.; Michael Seale, who is Betty Clowers' nephew; and Peggy Hester, of 142 E. 10th St. Both Seale and Hester were at the Clowers' residence when the tornado struck.

Gov. Ronnie Musgrove, who viewed the storm's destruction from a helicopter Sunday, was expected to declare the county a state disaster area.

The tornado that drove through Pontotoc Saturday night came barely a week after storms raked three north-central Mississippi counties.

President Bush made the first disaster declarations of his administration Friday for Holmes, Oktibbeha and Lowndes counties. The destruction Saturday night in Pontotoc, as well as several other points throughout the Magnolia State, may be part of declaration No. 2.

Robie Vansteenburgh was watching a football game on television Saturday night when a news bulletin warned of the tornado.

"Everybody, hit the floor!" he shouted, as powerful winds filled the air, causing the house to explode.

"It sounded like a freight train was coming through the house. We all jumped in the hallway and the house blew apart. Everyone was everywhere," Vansteenburgh said.

Minutes later, dazed, injured and digging through the rubble, Vansteenburgh pulled Evan, his nearly 10-year-old stepson from the rubble.

Evan would have been 10 Sunday, Vansteenburgh said. The youth and four of his friends were celebrating his birthday and had just finished eating pizza and cake when the tornado struck the Vansteenburghs' East 10th Street home. He pulled Evan's four friends from the rubble. They were injured but OK, Vansteenburgh said. He pulled his stepson, Evan, from the rubble last. "I picked him up and held him in my arms. I could tell he was barely alive."

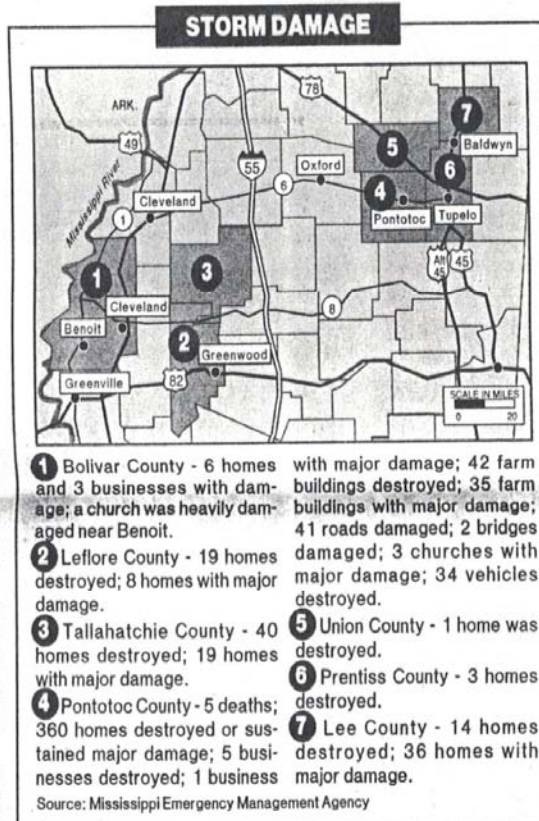
Once Evan was freed from the rubble, there were too many trees and power lines on the roads to get his stepson to the hospital, Vansteenburgh said. "It took 45 minutes for the emergency vehicle to get there."

From the air, the path of the tornado was clearly visible. Running diagonally from southwest to northeast across Pontotoc County, the twister cut a path up to a mile-wide in places, leaving an aerial view of homes and barns turned into match sticks and crumpled foil.

Where the tornado couldn't destroy structures it tore into fresh-plowed fields, ripping a jagged trench through the orderly rows.

After crossing Pontotoc County, the twister lifted back into the skies, Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Chief Pilot Gary White said. "Sherman is the last spot where we can find where it was on the ground," he said.

Police, emergency response agencies and volunteers came from as far away as Alcorn County, near



Harold Gater/The Clarion-Ledger

the Tennessee state line, Chickasaw County, Leake, Lafayette and Union counties, Mask said.

By Sunday evening, most of the roads were passable, Director of Pontotoc County Emergency Management Services Rickey Jagers said.

Thirty-three injured people were brought into the Pontotoc Hospital between midnight and 3 a.m. by ambulance and by private vehicles. Of those 33, five were dead, Pontotoc Hospital spokesman Len Grice, said.

One of the 33 was admitted to Pontotoc Hospital and was listed

in good condition Sunday evening.

In addition to the damage caused in Leflore and Pontotoc counties, five other north Mississippi counties reported damage to homes.

In Tallahatchie County, 40 homes and 19 mobile homes were destroyed, officials say.

In Bolivar County, four homes were destroyed and two others sustained major damage.

Six homes in Prentiss county and one home in Union County were severely affected, and 14 in Lee county were destroyed while 36 others sustained major damage.

Families: Shelter set up, but most seek family, friends

From 1A

said they believed tornado victims chose to stay with family and friends instead of at emergency shelters.

"We always try to pull together as a community when something like this happens," Pontotoc Mayor Bill Rutledge said. "Still, it's going to take a long time to recover from this. This is the kind of town where when one of us hurts, we all hurt."

Volunteers at the West Heights Baptist Church said they housed three people late Saturday, but by Sunday morning, family members or friends had claimed their boarders.

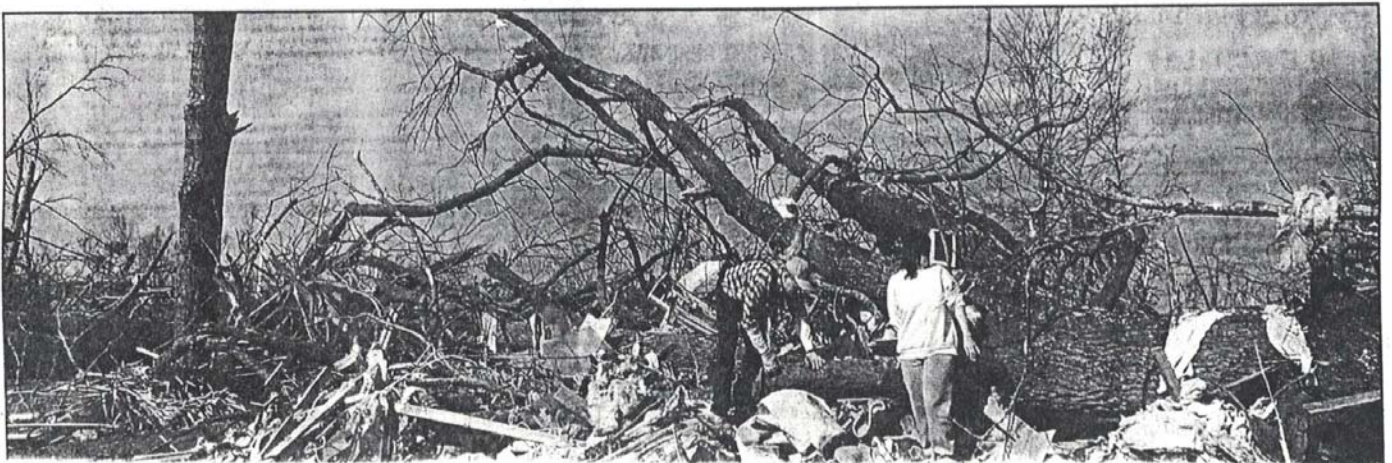
The volunteers said they fed about 1,000 tornado victims and emergency workers Sunday, mostly from food donated by residents and area restaurants.

"We've had food coming in and going out all day long," said volunteer Rose Mitchell. "A lot of churches in Tupelo and some of the other towns sent a lot."

Ernestine Rosenbaum began preparing meals and helping arrange sleeping space for homeless neighbors at 1:30 Sunday morning.

She finally decided to go home at about 8 p.m., as the last of the emergency workers who had come to restore power had finished eating.

"We'll be back (today) at 5 a.m. for breakfast," Rosenbaum said. "There are plenty of people left who still need feeding."



'We all jumped in the hallway and the house blew apart'



J.D. Schwalm/The Clarion-Ledger

Riley and Brenda Seale salvage the family Bible and other items from 10th Street in Pontotoc during Saturday's tornado. Michael Seale was the site of their nephew's home, which was swept from the hilltop on killed along with his aunt, Betty Clowers, and her son, Donnie.

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J.D. Schwalm/The Clarion-Ledger

CLARION-LEDGER: 02/26/2001

Page two coverage of the Pontotoc, Mississippi, and surrounding communities damage from 32.5 mile long, one-mile wide path of a massive twister that killed five and devastated communities throughout the area.

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A smothered, covered 'I do'

by Katherine R. Dougan
04-06-2000

The bride wore an ecru- and eggshell- colored dress, accented with seed pearls and sequins.

Her father, dapper in a blue dress shirt and navy tie, took his daughter's arm and guided her down the aisle.

As the first strains of Ty Herndon's country song, "Living in a Moment" began to play, a grill cook and two waitresses stepped beside the soda machine to let the bride pass.



PHOTO: Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star: Randy and Frankie Doering get into Randy's wrecker after saying their vows at the Waffle House on Quintard Avenue Wednesday night.

As Frankie Wilson and her father, Max Dunn, rounded the end of the Anniston Waffle House counter, the guests — many of them regular customers — smiled, some dabbing tears from their eyes.

Other diners paused with forks poised in midair, just watching.

Groom Randy Doering waited for his bride in front of the juke box, which was decorated with an arrangement of pink gladiolas, lavender blossoms and a pearl white bow.

Some folks might think getting married at the Waffle House is an odd notion, but for Ms. Wilson and Doering, it was an obvious choice.

The couple met at the Waffle House, where Ms. Wilson has been a waitress off and on for more than 20 years.

Doering first asked Ms. Wilson out for a date at the Waffle House.

And about two weeks ago, Doering asked Ms. Wilson to marry him at the Waffle House during rush hour on a Saturday morning.

"We were blowing out the doors, we were so busy (that day)," said Ms. Wilson's sister, Traci Gann, who has worked at the Waffle House for 14 years. "When he asked her to marry him, it stopped her in her tracks."

FRONT PAGE

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The groom is an on-call wrecker driver in Anniston and a regular customer at the Quintard Avenue Waffle House.

"I had always noticed him, but he had dated somebody else until a month before we started going out," Ms. Wilson said.

The couple started seriously dating two months ago, after Ms. Wilson had a dream about Doering.

"My sister, Traci, told him I dreamed about him," Ms. Wilson said.

Most of their courting happened over the Waffle House counter. "Lots of time he just drank coffee. He's a wrecker driver and would be on rotation a lot. He would wait there (Waffle House) until he got a call. It was like his office, especially on third shift," Ms. Wilson said.

At lunch time Wednesday, there were no signs of the upcoming nuptials; however, conversation among employees and regular customers centered around the wedding.

"One thing about Frankie, she doesn't do anything halfway," said Christy Coggins. Wednesday, Ms. Coggins came in early on her shift to allow Ms. Wilson time to prepare for the wedding.

Eight hours later, Ms. Wilson was back in the Waffle House saying "I do" instead of "Do you want your hash browns scattered, smothered and covered?"

Ms. Coggins expressed no surprise that the couple decided to marry.

"I saw them making goo-goo eyes at each other lots of times, looking at each other over the counter like teen-agers," Ms. Coggins said.

The bride's sister, Ms. Gann, served as matron-of-honor, with Ms. Wilson's three daughters and son, and Doering's son all taking part in the ceremony.

The Rev. Ralph Hughes said it was the first time he had conducted a wedding in a Waffle House.

Weddings are not uncommon at a Waffle House, said Jeff Wohl, a marketing manager for Waffle House Inc. in Norcross, Ga.

"Our customers and associates truly are family. Tonight's wedding certainly is not the first and probably will not be the last in a Waffle House, but they are always exciting," Wohl said.

After the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Randy Doering ran outside into a rainfall of grits, thrown by the handfuls by well-wishers.

Doering helped his bride climb into a red wrecker parked outside the entrance.

The sign on the back read: "Just Hitched."

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Visit from the Virgin Mary

Pilgrims receive a vision of peace

by Katherine R. Dougan
12-09-1999

"The wind is my sign. I will come in the wind. When the wind blows, know that I am with you. You have learned that the cross represents Christ; it is a sign of him. It is the same for the crucifix you have in your home. For me, it is not the same. When it is cold, you come to church; you want to offer everything to God. I am, then, with you. I am with you in the wind. Do not be afraid."

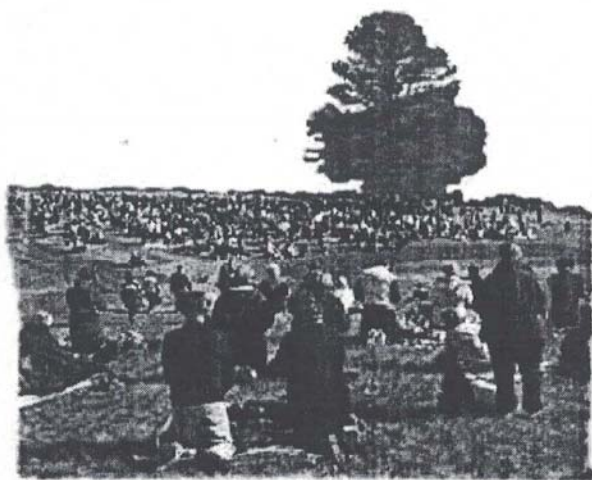


PHOTO: The Associated Press: As many as 3,000 people watched as Marija Pavlovic Lunetti of Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina reported a visit from the Virgin Mary in a field near Sterrett Wednesday. Below, a woman prays at a pine tree at the site.

— message given by the Blessed Virgin Mary in Medjugorje, February 15, 1984.

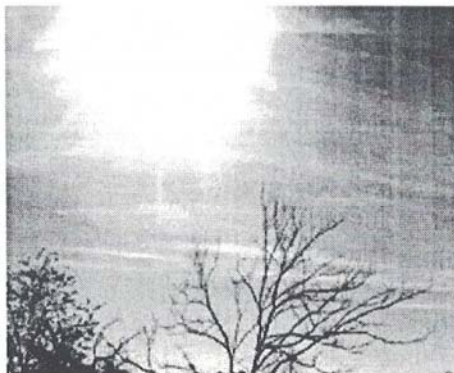
STERRETT

Laden with blankets and Bibles, 3,000 faithful pilgrims trekked along a rutted, dirt road through a hilly pasture to see the Virgin Mary appear.

And to some, she did.

She appeared in the same field Wednesday morning where she was first sighted 11 years ago by visionary Marija Pavlovic Lunetti.

Yugoslavian-born Mrs. Lunetti first saw the Virgin Mary near a



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first saw the Virgin Mary near a towering pine tree in the pasture.

In a rare visit, she returned to Alabama at the request of Frank Colafrancesco, the founder of Caritas in Birmingham.



Caritas, which means love, was founded in 1986 and promotes pilgrimages, sponsors tours and sends newsletters to about 200,000 people in more than 100 countries.

The only two sites that are getting messages are at the site in Alabama and in Medjugorje, a province in Bosnia-Herzegovina, said Frank Sariano, a Eucharist minister at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Anniston.

Visions have been appearing at Medjugorje for 14 years, Sariano said.

Our Lady appeared to Mrs. Lunetti at about 10:45 Wednesday morning, according to a witness from Louisiana who would only give her first name of Mary.

“When she first saw the vision, Marija (Lunetti) immediately stopped talking,” Mary said. “She blessed the crowd several times and said she was taking our concerns with her. It was incredible.”

Different people reported that Ms. Lunetti said different things.

Some reported she said: “Do not forget that I am your mother and that I love you.”

“She asked us to pray for peace in our hearts, family and world,” added Mary Johnson of Tallahassee, Fla.

Neal Shupe of Anniston wasn't in the field when Virgin Mary appeared, but he carried the faithful to and from the site. Shupe drove an Alabama Limousine bus, starting the first run at 4:15 a.m.

“It's a very curious situation,” Shupe said. He wasn't sure how many faithful he carried to the site, but said he had been hauling them all day.

Most of the pilgrims on the journey wore hiking boots, jeans and heavy sweaters for the walk through the muddy pasture.

Shuttle buses carried Christians from Birmingham-area hotels and parking lots. Vehicles were parked off the sloped sides of the road leading to the shrine.

The Nixon family traveled from Tallahassee, Fla., to see the Virgin. They weren't disappointed.

This was not Jean Nixon's first trip to see an apparition. She had attended a Medjugorje conference in Orlando, Fla., but found the visit

to Alabama to be a unique and peaceful experience.

"It had been chilly, but was extremely warm — T-shirt warm — when the apparition appeared," Mrs. Nixon said. "I felt all cares were nonexistent."

Mrs. Nixon admitted she didn't actually see anything, but she said the experience was an overwhelming feeling of peacefulness.

"She's calling us back to Jesus. She asks for repentance, conversion and love for one another," Mrs. Nixon said.

Barbara Ridgeway traveled from her home in Elizabeth, Colo., just south of Denver, to see the Virgin Mary. She was nearly too overcome with emotion to speak.

"I can't describe it; it was just wonderful," Ms. Ridgeway said, her eyes glistening with tears.

A statue of the Virgin Mary stands in the protective shadow of a 120-foot pine tree whose branches reach out into the field like outstretched arms. A black wrought-iron fence surrounds the holy tree.

A woman bundled in winter clothes prayed fervently at the tree, her hand outstretched above her head, touching the trunk.

Stones were stacked at the statue's base. Crevices in the stones were laden with red roses, notes and gifts.

Two blond-haired little girls, clutching pages from a coloring book, approached the altar. They had colored pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and placed them at the base of her statue.

A blue plastic bucket filled with gold angel statues sat nearby, bedecked with red velvet bows and ribbon.

Just uphill from the altar, two elderly women sat cross-legged on an Indian blanket, eating Vienna sausages from a can with one hand, and reading from a prayer booklet with the other.

Some pilgrims rested, meditated or prayed. Others formed a line toward the woods, where two folding chairs sat at the woods' edge. A wooden sign identified the place for Confessions, with a robed minister there to listen.

Tents and ground cloths dotted the field, with several wooden crosses erected at various locations.

Amid the murmur of prayer and rustle of plastic wrap from lunches, a man wearing a red satin jacket embroidered with the image of Jesus slept, leaning against the 6-foot-high cross's base.

Patrick Hughes of Long Island, N.Y., was there because he said the Virgin told him to go. He was busy stringing beads, making rosaries

as he talked.

“I’ll give them away eventually, or donate them to Caritas,” Hughes said.

Mary Allen of New Jersey approached Hughes, asking where he learned to make rosaries. Soon the two were deep in conversation, each relating how they came to be at Caritas.

Hughes found a flier about the five-day pilgrimage abandoned on a bench at his church. A stranger Ms. Allen met gave her a brochure about the event.

“This is my first trip in my 42 years of life,” Ms. Allen said. “I’m not sure why I’m here, but (Our Lady will) let me know.

“She leads you. Sometimes you just have to smack yourself, to let yourself know it’s really happening.”

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I truly did not know what to expect most mornings when I arrived at work as a general assignment senior reporter at The Anniston Star. This particular morning my editor said I would be traveling to a cow pasture outside of Birmingham, AL, where a vision of the Virgin Mary was expected to appear around noon in a treetop.

A veteran Anniston Star photographer, the late and great Ken Elkins, went with me on this adventure.

We later confessed to each other that we didn’t “see” anything in the treetop, however, we did feel a palpable presence we couldn’t explain.

My only regret is that I wore fancy leather boots to work that day, which were never quite the same after stomping miles through a muddy cow pasture.

--Katherine R. Dougan