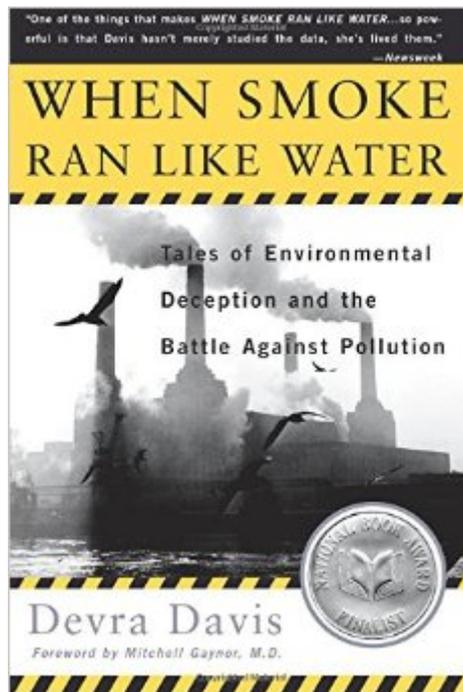


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# When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales Of Environmental Deception And The Battle Against Pollution



## Synopsis

The National Book Award Finalist from a leading public-health expert, this is the unknown story of how environmental pollution has affected our health-past, present, and future

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The headline in today's paper reads, "EPA drops clean-air action against plants." It goes on to say that after weakening the Clean Air Act for future power plant expansions, the Bush administration has now dropped enforcement actions already in progress against dozens of coal powered plants suspected of illegally pumping thousands of tons of pollution into the air. The headline makes it clear why we need more people like Devra Davis and more books like *When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Pollution*. Davis, who holds a masters degree in public health, is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, an adviser to the World Health Organization, and an original researcher into the impacts of air pollution on health worldwide. *When Smoke Ran Like Water* is her personal take on how letting businesses dump toxins into the air people breathe and the water they drink has resulted in illness-racked lives and hundreds of thousands of deaths throughout history. The story gets personal when she describes the clot of industrial pollution that settled over her hometown of Donora, Pennsylvania on October 26, 1948, sickening half the town and killing eighteen people outright. Like the deadly smogs that killed 12,000 people in London in 1952, the Donora deaths were swept under the carpet by officials; keeping the factories running was deemed far more important than a few "extra" deaths. The really

shocking point Davis makes, however, is that such dramatic events represent just a tiny fraction of the illness, disability, and premature death caused by the long-term impact of chronic air pollution.

In the Absence of Corporate Conscience By Judith Poole Davis, Devra. (2002). *When Smoke Ran Like Water: tales of environmental deception and the battle against pollution*. NY: Basic Books. \$26.00. Available, Minuteman Library

In this compelling volume, Davis casts a brilliant spotlight on historic precedents and modern events that pit public health against corporate welfare. With a clear focus, she addresses the history of industrial and automobile generated air pollution, the challenges and complexities of epidemiological research, and problems generated when decisions and decision makers are politically motivated. She weaves these strands together in a personal narrative that is at once riveting and convincing. The impact of environmental challenges on the health of children, older people, and future generations is made evident. The reader comes away with greater understanding, aware of what's really going on in the trenches. The age old conflict between those who think nothing of polluting our environment and those who work hard attempting to protect it only escalates. *When Smoke Ran Like Water* may be just the antidote to the apathy among those of us who feel overwhelmed. Everywhere one looks, decades of hard won environmental protections are dismantled while, in the language of doublespeak, the administration claims "progress". In this volume, we learn about damage caused by air borne toxic substances. Like a Hollywood box office thriller, we learn that deep pockets allow industry-mounted campaigns. Expensive paid experts are hired to dispute every finding, willing to intimidate researchers with the audacity to conduct research that might condemn the corporate approach to doing business.

I never saw my grandfather, Rade Talovich. He died several years before I was born. After he emigrated from Serbia, he spent his life working steam shovels in the factories of Donora, Pennsylvania. He died suddenly in his fifties, a few months after the killer smog of 1948. I have never visited Donora. After he left, my father, Peter, never wanted to see the town again. We lived in LA, about as far from Donora as you can get in the continental USA. I remember the whole class crying as we sat on the football field during PE class at Pasadena High. We were sitting because the air was so bad we were not allowed to play; we were crying because the air hurt so much. We would try to see Mt Wilson, a few miles right behind our school. Usually we couldn't. (Every time this happened, there would always be a couple guys who passed the time chatting about what kind of cars they wanted. Inevitably big powerful ones.) My father never really told us what happened to our grandfather. Now, reading *When Smoke Ran Like Water*, I know more about it. Who needs Stephen

King when you can get scared out of your mind by the solid facts about the air in your lungs? Dr Davis states her cases clearly and meticulously. It is a pleasure to read her beautifully sculptured sentences. I burst out laughing more than once at her nicely planted pronouncements. (Also, in this era of baldly explicit descriptions, it is nice to read her respectful "G-d") The focus of the book is pollution, so there are a few avenues that could bear further exploration. She examines the important problem of breast cancer from the angle of pollutants. In *Diet For A New America*, John Robbins documented the role of eggs in causing breast cancer.

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