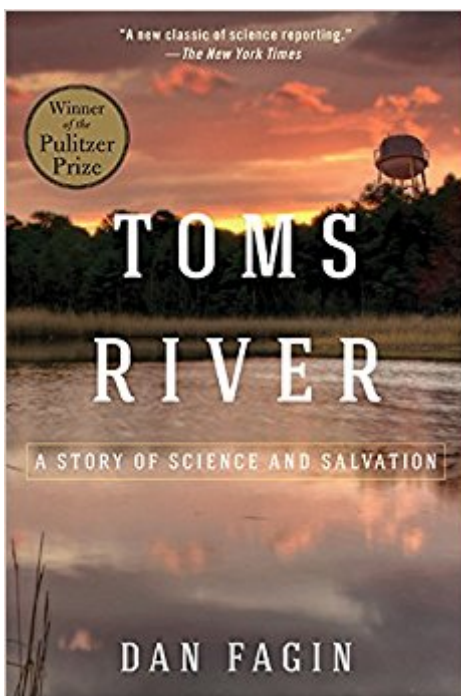


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# Toms River: A Story Of Science And Salvation



## Synopsis

The true story of a small town ravaged by industrial pollution, Toms River won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize and has been hailed by The New York Times as "a new classic of science reporting." Now available in paperback with a new afterword by acclaimed author Dan Fagin, the book masterfully blends hard-hitting investigative journalism, scientific discovery, and unforgettable characters. One of New Jersey's seemingly innumerable quiet seaside towns, Toms River became the unlikely setting for a decades-long drama that culminated in 2001 with one of the largest environmental legal settlements in history. For years, large chemical companies had been using Toms River as their private dumping ground, burying tens of thousands of leaky drums in open pits and discharging billions of gallons of acid-laced wastewater into the town's namesake river. The result was a notorious cluster of childhood cancers scientifically linked to local air and water pollution. Fagin recounts the sixty-year saga of rampant pollution and inadequate oversight that made Toms River a cautionary tale. He brings to life the pioneering scientists and physicians who first identified pollutants as a cause of cancer and the everyday people in Toms River who struggled for justice: a young boy whose cherubic smile belied the fast-growing tumors that had decimated his body from birth; a nurse who fought to bring the alarming incidence of childhood cancers to the attention of authorities who didn't want to listen; and a mother whose love for her stricken child transformed her into a tenacious advocate for change. Rooted in a centuries-old scientific quest, Toms River is an epic of dumpers at midnight and deceptions in broad daylight, of corporate avarice and government neglect, and of a few brave individuals who refused to keep silent until the truth was exposed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What was in the water in Toms River? A seemingly high number of childhood cancer cases in the New Jersey town prompted the question, but there turned out to be no easy answer. As Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) investigated the tragic impact that unethical scientific pursuits had on a family, *Toms River* unravels the careless environmental practices that damaged a community. The book goes beyond the Toms River phenomenon itself to examine the many factors that came together in that one spot, from the birth of the synthetic chemical industry to the evolution of epidemiology to the physicians who invented occupational medicine. Former *Newsday* environmental journalist Fagin's work may not be quite as riveting in its particulars as Skloot's book, but it features jaw-dropping accounts of senseless waste-disposal practices set against the inspiring saga of the families who stood up to the enormous Toms River chemical plant. The fate of the town, we learn, revolves around the science that cost its residents so much. --Bridget Thoreson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"It's high time a book did for epidemiology what Jon Krakauer's best-selling *Into Thin Air* did for mountain climbing: transform a long sequence of painfully plodding steps and missteps into a narrative of such irresistible momentum that the reader not only understands what propels enthusiasts forward, but begins to strain forward as well, racing through the pages to get to the heady views at the end. And such is the power of Dan Fagin's *Toms River*, surely a new classic of science reporting. . . a sober story of probability and compromise, laid out with the care and precision that characterizes both good science and great journalism." (The New York Times)"Dan Fagin's narrative of the arrival and explosive growth of a chemical plant in New Jersey in the 1950s . . . weaves a complex tale of powerful industry, local politics, water rights, epidemiology, public health and cancer in a gripping, page-turning environmental thriller." (National Public Radio)"Immaculate research . . . unstoppable reading . . . Fagin's book may not endear him to *Toms River*'s real estate agents, but its exhaustive reporting and honest look at the cause, obstacles, and unraveling of a cancerous trail should be required environmental reading." (The Philadelphia Inquirer)"If you have but a single new book to read, let this be the one. Its personalities, depth, and driving, detective-story-like narrative are as gripping as

anything in recent memory." (Environmental Forum)"Fagin's meticulously researched and compellingly recounted story of Toms River families struggling to find out what was causing the cancers that claimed their children belongs on the shelf with other environmental/medical mysteries. It's every bit as important and as well-written as A Civil Action and The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks." (The Star-Ledger)"Absorbing and thoughtful." (The USA Today)"This hard-hitting account of cancer epidemiology in the New Jersey town of Toms River is a triumph." (Nature)"In an account equal parts sociology, epidemiology, and detective novel, veteran environmental journalist Dan Fagin chronicles the ordeal of this quiet coastal town, which for decades was a dumping ground for chemical manufacturers. Fagin's compelling book raises broader questions about what communities are willing to sacrifice in the name of economic development." (Mother Jones)"This book stood out for its superb combination of compelling narrative and for its explanations of science and history....This thought-provoking work speaks to how the tragic tale of Toms River can happen and is happening other places." (Society of Environmental Journalists Rachel Carson Book Award judging panel)"Dan Fagin spent seven years investigating and writing the tale that is Toms River, and its Pulitzer Prize and more than 500 pages are a suitably epic testimony to those who fought for decades to bring justice to their town." (Resurgence & Ecologist)"...richly informative..." (The Week)"A thrilling journey through the twists and turns of cancer epidemiology, Toms River is essential reading for our times. Dan Fagin handles topics of great complexity with the dexterity of a scholar, the honesty of a journalist, and the dramatic skill of a novelist." (Siddhartha Mukherjee, M.D., author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer")"[Fagin] does a superb job of investigative research in documenting this story, one that is well worth preserving...highly recommended." (Electronic Green Journal)"Toms River is an epic tale for our chemical age. Dan Fagin has combined deep reporting with masterful storytelling to recount an extraordinary battle over cancer and pollution in a New Jersey town. Along the way as we meet chemists, businessmen, doctors, criminals, and outraged citizens we see how Toms River is actually a microcosm of a world that has come to depend on chemicals without quite comprehending what they might do to our health." (Carl Zimmer, author of "A Planet of Viruses" and "Parasite Rex")"At once intimate and objective, Toms River is the heartbreaking account of one town's struggle with a legacy of toxic pollution. Dan Fagin has written a powerful and important book." (Elizabeth Kolbert, author of "Field Notes from a Catastrophe")"Powerful, in-depth reporting that informs the public, shapes policy, and changes the world." (Winner's Citation, 2014 New York Public Library Helen Bernstein Book Award)"Masterful portrayal of the scientific process at work in a town facing

environmental crisis." (Winner's Citation, 2014 National Academies Communication Award)"A crisp, hard-nosed probe into corporate arrogance and the power of public resistance makes this environmental caper essential reading." (Publishers Weekly)"Waterborne destruction has visited Toms River before, albeit via less conspicuous channels, which Dan Fagin traces with marvelous precision in his new book, *Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation*." (The New Yorker)"Fagin's meticulously researched and compellingly recounted story of Toms River families struggling to find out what was causing the cancers that claimed their children belongs on the shelf with other environmental/medical mysteries. It's every bit as important and as well-written as *A Civil Action* and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*." (Newark Star-Ledger)"Deeply and thoroughly researched, it's a gripping, beautifully told, and thought-provoking account of a human tragedy. It also presents a fine history of a number of science and health-related topics that bear directly on the story that unfolds in the Toms River. Fagin is a gifted storyteller." (Chemical & Engineering News)"Toms River is absolutely riveting. I couldn't put it down. Dan Fagin has crafted a book about the consequences of industrial pollution that reads like a murder mystery. Read this book and the next time someone complains about too many environmental regulations you'll have clear answers for why government oversight of industrial waste production and disposal is so important." (Richard Besser, MD, chief health and medical editor, ABC News, former acting director, CDC)"It's a sure bet to keep you engrossed the whole way through. It's got to be the best nonfiction book I've read since *A Civil Action* (1995)." (Free Lance-Star)"Deftly combines investigative reporting and historical research to probe a New Jersey seashore town's cluster of childhood cancers linked to water and air pollution." (Winner's Citation, 2014 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction)

For nearly seven years, I worked as a lab technician at the Toms River Chemical Corporation. I remember the initial economic benefit the dye-and-plastics manufacturing plant brought to the community and its philanthropic projects designed to ingratiate it with the population. I remember endorsing the company's effluent pipeline and its alleged efforts to be a good neighbor. That was then. Before the knowledge became public that the plant's Swiss masters were following a time-dishonored tradition: from originally polluting the Rhine River, next to polluting the Ohio River, and finally to polluting the Toms River. Before we knew that waste organics were being secretly dumped onto the sandy soil, where they leached into the groundwater, polluting not only individual wells but the township wells too. Before the onset of the cancer cluster that claimed the lives of

many children whose mothers' only sin seemed to be unknowingly drinking tainted water during pregnancy. This book delves deeply into the history of the dye industry and the lessons it brought to Toms River--unfortunately, after the fact. The thorough documentation, in the form of endnotes, often provides sidebars that are fascinating in themselves. This is not a book you'll read in one sitting. The science is detailed and sometimes overwhelms. The anguish of the families is palpable. And the political posturing and deception displayed by the players can stimulate outrage. As well they should.

An interesting and well constructed book. Successfully brings together the history of the science with more recent tragic experiences. The subject matter exposes not only the historical limitations of a regulatory framework - which in theory is designed to protect our society, but also the existing limitations to this day.

This is an excellent book. It explains the investigation of the cancer spike in Toms River, NJ. It taught me more about cancer than I ever knew before

One of the most informative and well written books I have read in a long time. I read this for a Community Health Course and I cannot tell you how much my eyes have been opened to the water crisis in the United States and just how long this has been going on. A great read.

This is a thorough and revealing book, but not just about Toms River, a place where I lived for a number of years. The history of the chemical company in the town begins with its early pollutant days in Switzerland in the middle of the 1800's. However, the company is not the only player in this well-documented, carefully drawn story of deception, luck (both good and bad), innocent lives lost, and political fortunes changed. Science itself is a protagonist with its benefits and limitations clearly laid out. For all of its intense detail and research, it reads like a thriller. Even the details of statistical relevance move the story forward to its not necessarily predictable conclusion. If anyone is not convinced that large corporations have tremendous influence on environmental conditions and believe that they can control the political landscape, please read this book.

Using the Toms River cancer cluster as it's canvas, this book explicates the centuries old gap between the science of correlation and the proof of cause and effect. The fact that science seems incapable of confirming what appears to be a matter of common sense, should make us more

skeptical of common sense and less skeptical of science. However, the reverse is frequently and regrettably the case. But when considered in the context of the angst of parents seeking answers as to why their children are stricken with cancer in a polluted town, the reversal should be understandable, if not expected. Salvation for the bereaved lies not with science but in finding personal peace.

A heart breaking narrative of short sighted greed, combined with willful small town ignorance. It is surprisingly readable and gives a real understanding of the historical arc of coal tar and the riches that it bestowed upon a few men. Its hard for me to believe that as recently as the mid 1960's , well within my lifetime, otherwise bright people thought nothing of noxious smells and tastes coming out of their water taps..and never thought there could be any kind of a health problem there. As a people, we need to make sure that we are never poisoned like this again and to bring all the people complicit to justice.

Tom's River was loaded with interesting history from as far back as the 1500s to the present time. This book reveals the extreme pollution that corporations have. recklessly dumped on communities not only in the US, but all over the world Their goal was to make money even at the expense of human life. I enjoyed this read as I gained a lot of knowledge, however, one can only ponder the diseases we are fighting, and how much environmental factors are the cause. I highly recommend this book.

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