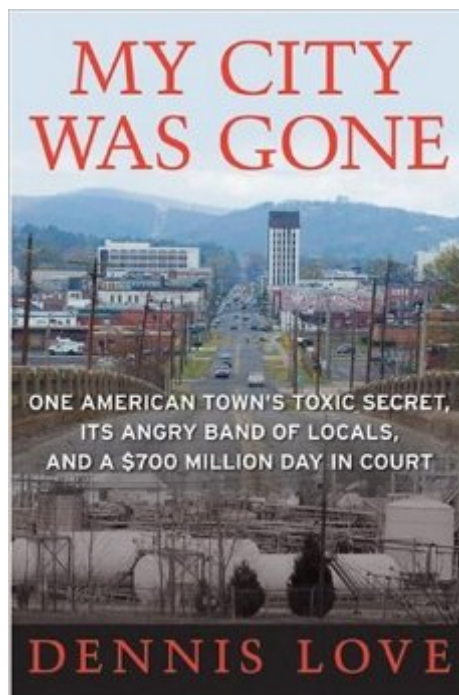


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My City Was Gone: One American Town's Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band Of Locals, And A \$700 Million Day In Court



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

BOOK REVIEW A chronicle of small-town life and what almost destroyed it
By Robert Braile, Globe Correspondent | August 28, 2006
My City Was Gone: One American Town's Toxic Secret, Its Angry Band of Locals, and a \$700 Million Day in Court
By Dennis Love
Morrow, 344 pp., \$25.95
In "My City Was Gone," Dennis Love's superb book on Anniston, Ala., the journalist at one point meets his old Anniston Star editor for a drink. Love had left his job and hometown years earlier, restless for change. He ended up in California, adrift at 40. "Then he swung back around on me," Love writes about the editor. "Listen," he said, and I could see him taking me in with a long hard look. "Don't lose track of who you are. Don't distance yourself from the people and places that make you distinctive." He drained his glass and looked at me again. "Don't get too far from home." Love returned home by writing "My City Was Gone." It displays his talents as a reporter and memoirist in exploring one of America's darkest environmental nightmares, that of the Monsanto Corporation's chemical pollution of Anniston and the military's storage and incineration there of a massive stockpile of Cold War chemical weapons. But this book is more than eco-drama, a trend that surged in 1995 with Jonathan Harr's "A Civil Action" and has thrived since. Love suggests a deeper theme -- that he and Anniston were fated long ago to become who and what they are, and that no one can get too far from home.

My City Was Gone recounts journalist Dennis Love's return to his former home in Anniston, Alabama; the book, however, is not just about his homecoming. Love focuses on the Monsanto Corporation's environmental crimes in Anniston. Monsanto spent decades dumping pollutants in the local ecosystem. Anniston's residents subsequently developed incredibly-high rates of many diseases, including cancer. In My City, Love examines Anniston's impact on the outside world and the outside world's (often- negative) impact on Anniston. There are many things to like about the book. Love is a talented writer with a good sense of the rhythm (peaks and valleys) in his story; he keeps the narrative moving forward and does not bore you. Also, Love has a good feel for Alabama and its people. He gives a vivid account of what it was like to grow up in Alabama, attend the University of Alabama, and work at the Anniston Star newspaper. He also has a flair for bringing characters to life. In My City, you will meet: a) Donald Stewart - a former U.S. Senator who led the litigation against Monsanto, b) David Baker - who moved away to New York City to work as a labor organizer and then returned to Anniston to help organize the community against Monsanto, and c) Love, who recounts his long journey from Anniston to California and back. Monsanto Corporation is the villain in the story; by any standard, its conduct was horrific. After Monsanto began to pollute the local rivers, the fish in those rivers eventually developed PCB levels 7500 times greater than the allowable level. Even more damning is the fact that Monsanto had known since the 1930s that the PCBs it produced were dangerous to human health. You won't come away from My City is Gone with much respect for corporate America.

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