

Not my Great-Grandfather's Disease

My disease did not exist when my Great-Grandfather was disabled by two shots with Pennsylvania's Bucktails at Fredericksburg. My illness, Ulcerative Colitis, an IBD, is an invisible disability. Only those who have lived this disease say things like, "It cost me a decade of my life." The others say, "Stop drinking coffee."

This disease cost me two decades. It seems what it didn't inflame, blind, ulcerate, numb, weaken, the meds did.

It is a chronic inflammatory disease first described in 1875 with the rise of coal combustion machines and the accompanying sulfurous gases. A 2010 research article says "children and young adults living in areas with higher levels of SO<sub>2</sub> were more likely to develop this disease" (Am J of GI 2010;105:2412-2419)-- which is interesting because it is mostly a disease of the young.

The other, far more debilitating IBD, is Crohns. The same article found "Young individuals were more likely to be diagnosed with Crohns Disease in areas of higher concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub>."

I have had chemo infusions in the GI's office next to kids holding teddy bears and blankets. I have taught community college students who have lain ill months at Johns Hopkins or Hershey Med, and have the bills to prove it.

We are the invisible disabled who breathe Pennsylvania's second most toxic air in the US, with 82% of it derived from the electric sector.

Air pollution kills; however, air pollution studies are few because they are "extremely complex to design." (Kaplan, "Inflamm Bowel Dis, May 2011) But it was not difficult in 2001-2002 during 11 months of "extreme" drought (mrcc.Cornell.edu) for me to see the dark brown ribbon laying above East Pennsboro across the Susquehanna. Pollution advisories warned against going outside. I called Gov. Ridge's office to ask the source of the pollution. "From coal plants in Ohio" was the reply.

Six children stopped breathing in East Pennsboro schools during that school year. Three deaths were "sudden and unexpected." (PADoH) I believe a mitigating factor was air pollution accumulation due to lack of rain.

Tell the negligent coal companies: "Listen to the pediatricians and turn on the scrubbers. This honorable Commonwealth protects its own."

March 15, 2015

Mary Hills Hoffman  
2300 N 2nd St.  
Harrisburg, PA 17110