

Testimony submitted by Susan Wallace-Babb 10-31-07

## IS THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY WORTH **YOUR** LIFE?

TO ALL REPRESENTATIVES:

In January, 1997, I purchased my “dream property” after searching for it for several years while living in Rifle, CO. I’m speaking of the unique treasure known as Morrisania Mesa, an 880 area east of Battlement Mesa above the town of Parachute, CO. These 880 acres were subdivided in the late 1800’s into 10 or more acre parcels. Its residents enjoy 360 degree views of varied geological formations, wildlife, irrigation water and mostly excellent neighbors; the kind who still know one another and come to help as a matter of course when needed. They share similar interests and yearly convene for the Annual Pie and Ice Cream Social at the Community House.

I had seven irrigated acres with pastures for my horse and hay fields where I yearly grew my own hay. I had a wonderful barn and various outbuildings needed to house all the equipment I used in the haying process and organic gardening. I could ride my horse from my property onto the BLM lands that surrounded me. My house was totally remodeled inside and out and one of the original houses from 1906. It was my life’s dream come true.

What could be sadder than to see it all ending? But it was as the oil and gas industry moved in to foul the water, air, land and lives.

My narrative takes you through my personal experience with the oil and gas industry. I narrowly avoided death and now live a life very different from the one I was living seconds before I stepped out of my truck into a cloud of gas from an open condensate tank. I am “chemically damaged” for the rest of my life.

Though I had known about the original well at the dead end of my rural road, I was not concerned because I believed this industry was regulated to prevent damaging all living things and that human lives would be deemed worth protecting. Being a dead end road, I was never close to the well until I began working next to them (the one well had been fractured in 2003 or 2004, thereby creating two wells) as an irrigator in late March, 2005. From

the first time I began working near the wells, I was unknowingly exposed to fugitive gases coming from the two wells and open condensate tanks less than 100 feet from the water head gate. Within ten minutes of being at the head gate I experienced a pounding heart rate, weakness, burning sinuses, eyes and skin, coughing, ringing in my ears and blurred vision.

When I returned home, the symptoms gradually abated and I thought perhaps I was allergic to some weed near the head gate, even though I had never been an allergy sufferer.

On April 4, and April 11, 2005, I went to my family doctor because my sinuses were so raw and painful. He gave me a round of antibiotics yet I didn't improve.

By April 11, 2005, I was spending more time near the wells. All the above symptoms continued and worsened. I then went to an ENT for a second round of antibiotics, but still no improvement followed.

During May, 2005, I was near the wells on a daily basis. I sometimes worked near them twice a day. Now my symptoms included all the original ones, much intensified, plus shooting pains in the nerves of my legs and bottoms of my feet, making walking nearly impossible. But still when I was home, less than one half mile upwind from the wells, given extended time, the symptoms lessened.

June 7 and June 15, 2005, I was back at the ENT's getting more antibiotics and medicines to reduce respiratory inflammation and breathing difficulties. If only I had made the connection between my symptoms and my increasing time near the wells I would not be writing this...but I didn't.

On June 24, 2005, at 9:00 pm, I stepped out of my truck into a cloud of toxic chemicals from the condensate tanks. Putting one leg out the truck door and on the ground, I turned to reach the charcoal mask I had taken to wearing while I worked at the head gate. Before I could reach it a crushing headache overcame me and I began to collapse. As I was falling, I grabbed the top of my truck door and was clinging there as my consciousness was fading out. I don't know how long I was there. As clarity returned, I dove into my truck, grabbed my mask and sat there until I could think.

I then drove home and called the sheriff to report something wrong at the wells. They called the fire department and all the emergency vehicles began arriving to the well site. I saw them passing my house. They called the Williams Production representative to the site. They were still down there at 1:00 am when I finally fell asleep with extreme nausea, body pain and a crippling headache.

The next morning I awakened to the meaning of being chemically sensitized and the changes that were to be my “life change” that continues today if I am exposed to natural gas, propane, and other petroleum products. All the original symptoms return, plus vomiting, explosive diarrhea, bloody mucus from nose and lungs, headaches, tongue ulcers, mental foggiess and neurological problems.

I called in an incident report to The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) regulator. I never received as much as a phone call in return until I told this story in front of a full audience during a COGCC meeting in Rifle, CO on 7-11-05. Afterward, I did receive a call from another COGCC regulator and a copy of the COGCC report stating that one of the condensate tanks created the gas cloud at the well site. The report said Williams Production’s solution was to place a top on the tank. No one was concerned about the damages I received.

One of the two well regulators for hundreds of wells in Garfield County came to my house during July or August along with the Williams Production representative. Both promised to help me in any way possible. When I called the Williams representative asking what chemicals I was exposed to, at my doctor’s request so he could treat me accordingly, I was told no one in that company knew what chemicals were in condensate and that no records were kept of such incidents. The next I heard from Williams was when their Senior Attorney in Oklahoma assured me Garfield County had everything under control and there were no chemicals involved with oil and gas production that were harmful to people. Since I no longer could expose myself to the air inside or outside my house without triggering all the symptoms, I put little faith in her words.

I returned to my family doctor who diagnosed me as chemically sensitized by the event and said I would never be able to tolerate my environment that had once been so healthy for me for nearly ten years. He further stated that I needed to avoid the air until I could sell my house and find somewhere that

had an environment I could tolerate. I purchased three powerful air cleaners, closed my house up tight, and wore a full face respirator with multiple gas neutralizing cartridges each time I went outside to do minimal chores. As winter approached I learned that my natural gas heating source that I had used for nine previous winters now triggered all my symptoms with an additional symptom of hives. With four electric space heaters, I was able to maintain a 58 degree temperature inside. I was a prisoner inside my house.

Through intense research online and conversations with scientists, doctors, and an EPA toxicologist in Denver it became apparent that one of the chemicals that had damaged me was hydrogen sulfide. Each scientist I shared this event with told me I was lucky to be alive because I had certainly been exposed to deadly levels of hydrogen sulfide that caused my collapse and loss of consciousness. I was saved by the fact I was able to cling to the truck door avoiding the much higher levels of gas at ground level due to its heavier than air weight.

It took nine months to find a place where I could mostly tolerate the air without triggering symptoms. I've spent thousands of dollars being evaluated and treated by doctors who are specialists in environmental poisoning. I continue to need intensive treatment on a daily basis and still don't know the full extent of the physical damage. I am hopeful the resultant neurological problems will stabilize.

So has the oil and gas industry changed my life? Yes, exactly, right down to my cellular level. It caused me to lose my home, my friends, my way of life, my health and my belief in my government. I once believed governmental agencies like the EPA protected its citizens. I now know the EPA has been stripped of its power to do its defined job. All activities related to exploration for and recovery of oil and gas are exempt from the laws made to protect our environment and citizens. The oil and gas industry in Colorado is regulated by those who benefit from non-regulation and irresponsible actions where oil and gas are concerned. In a situation where the fox guards the hen house, it's deadly being a hen.