



The Cyanide Canary: A True Story of Injustice

Joseph Hilldorfer, Robert Dugoni

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From Robert Dugoni, the #1 Kindle -bestselling author of MY SISTER'S GRAVE, and Environmental Protection Agency Special Agent Joseph Hilldorfer comes a true story of good and evil, greed and its consequences, and an elusive quest for justice...

Early in the morning on August 27, 1996, twenty year old Scott Dominguez showed up for an ordinary day at the fertilizing plant where he worked. By 11:00am, he was clinging to life, unconscious and suffocating from toxic exposure to cyanide in a tank that was supposed to contain only mud and water.

EPA Special Agent Joseph Hilldorfer was tasked with finding out what really happened on that horrific day in Soda Springs, Idaho, but the answers would not be easily uncovered. For more than four years Hilldorfer, his partner Bob Wojnicz, and a force of top-ranking U.S. attorneys struggled to expose the disturbing truths behind the tragedy, but would their efforts be enough to put the man responsible, Allan Elias, behind bars?

Dugoni, a New York Times bestselling author known for his heart-pounding legal thrillers, and Hilldorfer, the agent who lived and breathed the Dominguez case, pen a compulsively readable work that is every bit as enthralling as fiction, yet is alarmingly true.

A Washington Post Best Book of the Year selection

“The Cyanide Canary is a marvelously suspenseful tale...a bona fide thriller pitting joyous, decent good guys against a villain without a scintilla of redeeming social value. Who wins in this robust scenario? Read the book and find out.”

The Washington Post

“...As compelling as any brilliantly written murder mystery... A roller-coaster ride of a book.”
New York Times bestselling author, Ann Rule

“...An important book for anyone concerned about the world around them.”
Former EPA Administrator, Christie Todd Whitman

Kirkus STARRED Review: “...An electrically charged narrative... A top-notch nonfiction legal thriller.”

Booklist STARRED Review: “An enthralling legal drama. This account engages the reader, evoking both outrage over worker safety and suspense over the outcome of the trial. The authors...tell a fully rounded, gripping story of how environmental crime is prosecuted in the real world.”

The Cyanide Canary: A True Story of Injustice Details

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From Reader Review The Cyanide Canary: A True Story of Injustice for online ebook

Ila says

Fascinating and Insightful

An excellent look at one criminal environmental case, the unbelievable amount of work that goes into attempting to prosecute the responsible party, and how heartless people can be in their pursuit of a few more dollars in their bank account. Written like a novel, easy to read and understand, highly recommend!

Nancy Silk says

"An Important True Story"

This true story takes place in Soda Springs, Idaho, in the late 1990's. It's about 20-year old Scott Dominguez who is tasked to clean out the sludge at the bottom of a huge tank used to store acid. The sludge, he's told, is only mud and water. But in fact, it contains cyanide. OSHA rules were ignored as to the safety and health of employees. EPA Agent Joseph Hilldorfer (this author) was tasked with the job to find facts about the horrific day where Dominguez is clinging to life. He's found unconscious and suffocating laying in the sludge. This is a fact-based legal thriller which everyone needs to read since our current president desires to remove such regulations to benefit and protect big business rather than the working class. The ending is sad and shocking. I could not put down this documentary. I applaud Robert Dugoni for bringing these events to the public.

Emily Crow says

This is one of those true stories that really engaged my interest and my emotions, a courtroom drama about a man who callously disregarded laws about worker safety and toxic waste, causing the permanent (and tragically unnecessary) brain damage and disability of one of his young employees. Many people these days question if we need stringent worker safety and environmental protection laws, or if that just creates an impediment to doing business. This book answers that question.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case; I'm originally from central Michigan (an illegal dumping ground for decades from the chemical industries), and I recently saw an article about how the land around St. Louis, MI (a small town about 10 miles from where I lived) is still, 30 years after the fact, so contaminated with toxic waste that birds are dying from eating the worms from the ground. (The company responsible declared bankruptcy and never had to pay a dime for cleanup.) But now I'm getting emotional again... (ahem! Better now.)

Anyway: read this book. And if your boss ever tells you to muck around with unknown substances in a confined space without protective gear, *don't do it.*

Pat says

Why is it that psychopaths who are narcissistic and have no care for others are able to talk everyone into doing what they want them to do and it takes forever for them to finally pay for their incredible damage to others. I just don't understand. Perhaps if everyone who worked in the area of law from Policemen, lawyers, judges, etc should be required to have a degree in psychology so they understand what manipulative personalities are pulling. Especially when its so obvious to others around them when this is happening. There needs to be a way to make people like this be held responsible for what they have done even while they are fighting the courts to keep them out of jail, because they will just continue to force their murderous, sad agenda on everyone. Sorry ... this is an especially bad time for me to have read this book due to the narcissistic psychopath in the White House. It was a good book and of course I had to keep reading to see what finally happened.

Glen Engel-Cox says

We lived and worked in eastern Washington State during the mid-1990s for environmental companies and both had to take safety classes where they explained the dangers of confined space entries and the precautions you have to take for working in those environments, not to mention all the other regulatory and safety requirements needed for working with hazardous chemicals. We were lucky: we were educated, well-paid, working for environmental clean-up companies with lucrative government contracts where safety was good business practice.

The circumstances detailed in *The Cyanide Canary* are 180 degrees different. Allen Elias, the owner of the Evergreen facility, was not engaged in environmental cleanup, but working on the cheap trying to develop a commercial means of reprocessing waste. His employees were high-school graduates desperate for a job, with no safety training or understanding of the requirements for confined space work, nor any clue, really, about the hazards of certain chemicals--things Elias did know. Which is why Elias was charged with criminal conduct after one of his workers was injured during a tank cleanout. The story of the accident, along with the resulting investigation, and trial, makes up this book, which reads like a long *Law & Order* episode, almost complete with the "Ka-Chung" sound at the end of each chapter. As such, it should appeal to *L&O* fans, or anyone with an interest in how environmental law is being developed.

The weakest part of the book is the beginning chapter, where the authors attempt to portray the events of the accident in an almost novelistic method, including trying for some suspense about whether the victim, Scott Dominguez, would survive or not. After they get that out of the way (more than likely, a suggestion from some bone-headed editor who felt the beginning needed some punch or a grab for the reader), the book settles down into its portrayal of Hildorfer's investigation, bolstered by all the interviews and transcripts that were eventually used to indict Elias and bring the case to trial. The truly riveting part of the book is not the opening, but the trial, the question of whether Elias will be found guilty, and whether or not he will attempt to flee justice.

I enjoyed the book quite a bit, reading it in two sessions during a train ride to and from NYC. It's a revealing look into the legal world, and also an interesting case study between the kinds of murder cases usually seen on *Law & Order* and the "white collar" crime that usually does not end up in jail sentences for the convicted.

Jo Faith Baker says

Environmental

This is the most complete book or article use ever read about the problem getting and keeping our planet clean. It is written in a way an uninformed person can follow, yet contains details that should be of interest to everyone.

Kat Faitour says

This book is a fast-moving page turner that reads like a fictional legal thriller. However, it's not fiction but a true story and one that simultaneously filled me with heartbreak, anger, and hope. This is one of those books that will stay with me for a long, long time--a true account of the very best in people colliding with the very worst. I highly recommend it.

Jenifer says

I enjoyed this book because the event took place in Idaho. It was interesting to learn about the environmental laws that corporations are "supposed" to abide by and all the loopholes and shady things they do to save a few bucks.

Allison Minjares says

Hardest 5 star to give

I started to give one star based on what Allen Elias did then remembered I'm reviewing the book. When it comes to law I have a layman's knowledge. I am hoping with the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico and the fines handed down that this problem is getting the punishment it deserves. How the system doesn't see that these people need jailed is beyond me. Watching first hand as a smoker who quit by switching to Vaping as big tobacco keeps trying to make Vaping illegal along with the government it continues to buy money talks bs walks. The groups of people they buy may be different but its all the government. While we can keep vaping even if they finally win environmental "accidents" won't ever go away. If comments could be posted to this I would be hearing how crazy and paranoid I am. The word freedom takes on a new context when you run it up against any government. Scott if your family keeps up with the comments you are beyond remarkable your life is not what you planned but you grabbed ahold of what was handed to. God bless you!

Barbara says

3.5 stars

Since time immemorial there's been a tug-of-war between entrepreneurs - whose goal is to make money - and anything that might reduce profits. Thus employers/corporations have been known to sell harmful or flawed products; make employees work in unsafe conditions; despoil the environment; and so on.

In the United States, laws have been passed to curtail these injurious practices, but enforcement is often lax (or nonexistent) because businesses provide jobs; create new products; propel the economy; contribute to political campaigns; and so on. As stated in the book: "This was business, big business, with a lot of money at stake and a lot of money to spend. Politicians depended on big business and big business depended on politicians. It was the American way."

In this equivocal situation, lawyers for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have struggled against mighty odds to bring scofflaws to justice. 'The Cyanide Canary' details the case against Allen Elias, who ordered a young employee named Scott Dominguez to clean a cyanide-contaminated tank WITHOUT safety equipment. As a result, Scott suffered severe brain damage, lost his fiancé - who was unable to care for him, and became dependent on his family - who could ill afford his medical/rehab bills. At the time a newspaper noted, "Scott Dominguez once loved to ski, play hackysack, hunt and fish. No more. An accident at work severely damaged his brain and left him with little muscle control." It became difficult for Scott to walk or speak, and it was only with enormous effort that he was able to do anything at all.

Elias, for his part, tried every trick in the book to squirm out of taking responsibility for the tragedy.....because he didn't care to pay reparations; didn't want to go to prison; and wanted to continue making money.

At the time of the incident, on August 27, 1996, Elias owned Evergreen Resources - a fertilizer company near Soda Springs, Idaho. For production purposes, Elias planned to use an old 25,000 gallon storage tank (36' long and 11' high) to hold a large shipment of sulfuric acid. However, the tank had previously been used to store the byproducts of a cyanide leaching process, and was still contaminated with a ton or two of cyanide-laced sludge. Thus Elias ordered a few workers, including Scott, to clean the tank. The circular entrance to the tank, located on top, was only 22" wide.....and Scott was slim - so he was sent in first.

During the cleaning process Scott collapsed and passed out, and - because the entrance to the tank was so small - his co-workers were unable to get him out. Emergency services were called but it took a long time to rescue Scott, and he was permanently damaged.

As soon as the incident occurred, Elias went into cover-your-ass mode. He proceeded to lie repeatedly; blame everybody else; forge documents; fake the availability of emergency equipment; convince his other employees (who needed their jobs) to conceal the truth; line up attorneys; and so forth. Meanwhile, government lawyers worked day and night to make a case against the fertilizer maker, who had been flouting safety laws for years.

Elias was eventually tried for various crimes, including 'disposing of hazardous waste without a permit' and 'knowing that his actions placed others in imminent danger of death or serious bodily injury.' The trial, and the innumerable machinations leading up to it, are well documented in the narrative, and the book should be a must-read for up and coming environmental lawyers.

Elias's attorneys - as was their job - obfuscated the issues; made numerous motions and pleas; delayed the trial; tried to suppress evidence; attempted to discredit witnesses.....you get the picture. And Elias, who seemed to think he was Teflon-coated, smirked and sneered and went on with his life - apparently convinced he'd never be convicted of anything. The prosecutorial team, in turn, made it's own maneuvers and counter-

maneuvers, and I was frequently on tenterhooks to see who would prevail with each step and counter-step.

I won't tell what happened in the end.....but you can look it up if you're dying to know.

The book is compelling and detailed.....perhaps too much so. The story includes not only the backgrounds of the victim and the defendant, but of the lawyers, witnesses, and other interested parties. Moreover, the yarn is dramatized way beyond what the writers could possibly know.....so it's kind of a fictionalized true story. However, the basic premise - that the EPA tried to make Elias accountable for his actions - is correct.

Sadly, Elias's case is far from an isolated incident, and harmful business practices are still going on. An epilog to the book makes it clear that some industries continue to ignore safety legislation, and it's very difficult to catch and prosecute them. In addition, many legislators don't want to pass more stringent environmental and worker protection laws - **and actually suggest that industry be allowed to police itself.** Ha ha ha.....who could possibly take that idea seriously! ?

This is an engaging (if overlong) book about an important topic, and I'd recommend it to readers interested in industrial safety, the preservation of the environment, and the kinds of selfish business moguls who look out only for themselves.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot....>

Linda says

I wasn't sure what to expect when receiving The Cyanide Canary. I have long been concerned about the harm being done to our environment, our food and our communities by large scale industry. In this book which looks at the use of cyanide gas in industry and the story of a young man harmed by his work. After listening to this book, I became even more concerned. This book examines the EPA, the legal system and the power to control and corrupt by big business. It provides information on these terribly important issues and challenged me to greater action. Following this nonfiction story of courtroom action and manipulations keeps the reader engaged during a long and difficult process. It is not a relaxing or easy read. I received a copy of this audio book in exchange for an honest review. I give it 4 stars and recommend it for all who are interested in reading about environmental, legal and quality of life issues.

Tom Mueller says

vg

Reads like a cross between a Robin Cook / John Grisham novel, this tragedy is all too true.

Ellen says

Favorite quote, from page 137: "This was business, big business, with a lot of money at stake and a lot of money to spend. Politicians depended on big business and big business depended on politicians. It was the American way."

We live in a country where the laws are made to protect the innocent until proven guilty. This means that the guilty who have money are often able to evade justice. That's the only explanation that makes sense to me for why it took over 2 years for this obvious case of criminal greed to go to trial and another year for sentencing to take place.

Every time I thought things were going to be wrapped up, something would come up to delay the final outcome a little bit longer. Because I knew this was an account of a true story, and not some movie plot, my frustration with it being dragged out only gave me sympathy for how the victim of the "accident" and the prosecutors who were trying to bring about justice must have felt. It was hard for me to put the book down, because I kept wanting to see justice served. In the end, all the loose ends were still not totally resolved to my satisfaction. Life goes on whether or not the victim is compensated, and whether or not the bad guy receives his just dues.

There are so many characters and intricate possibilities that come into play that this story could only have happened in real life. The authors did an excellent job of keeping it moving in spite of all the complications they must have had to sort through. The book begins with four reference pages of names of people involved, listed alphabetically, with a short description of the role each person played. I found myself referring to the list often to help me keep track of each person's role. At the end of the book, following the afterword, there is a similarly useful list that summarizes what became of each person up to that point. Also, when I got to the middle pages I was pleasantly surprised to discover a few photos that helped me to better visualize what happened, as well as giving faces to the characters who were involved.

There is some bad language that could have been left out. However, it did not bother me like it would have in the movies. I figured those words were included because they are what the people really said, not because the author had to use them in order to add drama. As a reader it was easy for me to skip over them, and I did not feel that they were used to excess.

This book will open your eyes to how our justice system works, to the importance of a clean environment, and to some of the things that go on in our own beautiful backyards. I admire the great intelligence and tenacity of the prosecuting attorneys and others who worked hard to see that justice was served. I greatly appreciate knowing that there are good, caring people in the world who have prepared themselves to fight for justice in many different battle arenas. God bless them for their convictions and their courage. God bless their wives and their families who support them in their efforts. Through the grace of God, it is heroes like them that keep America free.

Charlene says

This true story is a gripping read. Hard to put down! An unscrupulous business owner who ignores safety laws and regulations that nearly kills and ruins a young man's promising life. A relentless investigation to bring the criminal to justice ensues. Equally as good as a John Grisham novel. More compelling because it is true. It takes place in the pacific northwest

Pat says

The story of one man's singular disregard for any human being but himself and how his actions result in the lifelong disability of one of his workers (and injuries to others over time) as well as the intentional pollution of soil and ground water and subterfuge in hiding monies gained from illegal activities, blatant disregard for EPA regulations and guidelines and disdain for those charged with enforcing said regulations. Allan Elias for years played loosely with the law and believed he was far superior not only to those he employed and those

who would attempt to bring him to heal. A near fatal and permanently disabling event befalls a 20 year old employee and would start a four year long battle to finally stop Elias. EPA/CID special agent, Joseph Hilldorfer (also a co-author), worked tirelessly with many others to bring some level of justice to the injured worker, Scott Dominguez, and his family. Their story is revealed in breathtaking intensity as the investigation and prosecution waivers between success and defeat almost at every turn. A must read today, in 2018, as it was when published in 2004. Politics and environmental issues waiver from administration to administration but the damage wrought on persons and the planet on which we live are often times permanent and irreversible.
