



TEXAS CITY PLANT

March 30, 1981

To: Dr. S. D. Austin
Mr. J. B. Browning
Ms. Ann Haughton
Dr. T. A. Lincoln
Dr. H. M. Utidjian ✓
Mr. L. A. Wilkinson
Mr. R. L. Yelton

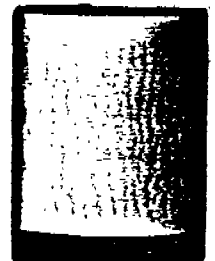
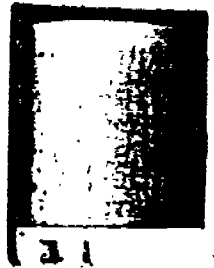
From: D. L. Engle

We were interviewed by this publication.
We are indeed grateful that the hatchet
swung only at Dow.

DLE/g=

Attachment

*file TC
Press Article*



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—my production down and holding others up. I believe I could have done better when back gets better. Done some jobs by self—where others would have needed help. . . . the very things I thought was right seemed to get me deeper in water: 1) advising some on how to do job. 2) Leave my job and show apprentice how to do job, if I could. 3) Safety—should have kept mouth shut—but thought I was helping. If I get back on job—I'll have to make a complete reverse of my safety thoughts and job improvement.

Saturday, June 26—They are pulling the strings—it's all right with me—"this psycho stuff," but I might have wanted to see an older one—thinking maybe he'd be more experienced. I could see, and I certainly wasn't worse than lot of others—most overly criticizing toward me.

Stone's penmanship, clear and neat on June 24, is slowly becoming that of a first grader.

[*Undated*]*—Go see my supervisor—get an appointment with retirement people at Personnel. . . . Be sure and don't agree to any retirement that will stop too shortly—like I heard happened to several of our men—who signed up wrong agreement.*

[*Undated*]*—According to [the company doctor], my work has ruined my cartilage in the right knee. He says this very common on-job injury—in and out of shells on knees, also knees taking a beating when running large air guns, impacts, etc.*

I know my knees get so sore couldn't hardly crawl back in shell sometime—they got OK in a few days—just kept working like always. I think back and knee should be mentioned in reports to . . . Dow.

[*Undated*]*—I've done some real accurate work on my retirement income. Don't know tax right but I'm not off far—I figured high. I think my income will be \$625 per week. GREAT! No more bang iron and working them old condensers. I know I'll get to feeling better. All other men looked so much better after they retire. We breathe some terrible fumes out there.*

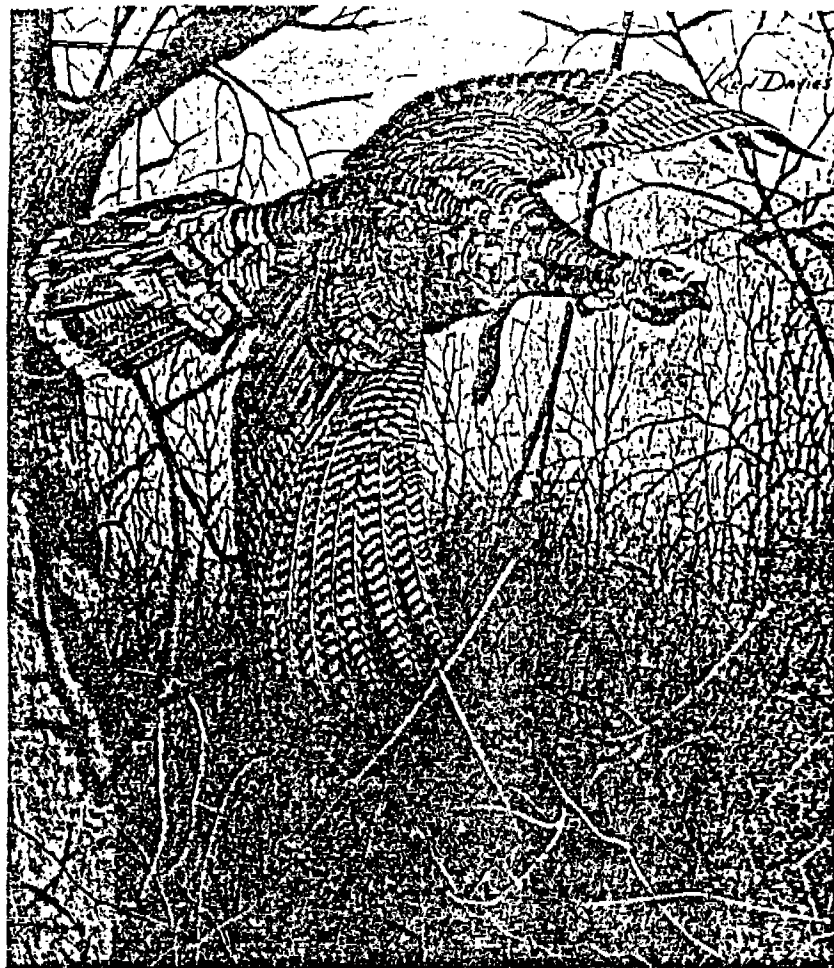
After a 16-month ordeal that took him through surgery for removal of a lemon-size brain tumor, a second round of surgery for removal of a blood clot in the brain, radiation treatments that left him paralyzed and bedridden for ten months, horrifying seizures, and loss of his ability to swallow, eat, talk, or see, Jack Stone died on October 13, 1977, of brain cancer.

Mary Stone says Dow has been awfully good to her since. She has a pension, and they look in on her occasionally. ■

SECRETARY FOR A DAY

(continued from page 47)

But I vetoed the suggestion. Yes, Dresser's name would deservedly get dragged through the mud, but how about *my* name? No, I had done no wrong, but I could see the headlines now: Man Sues To Be Secretary. The media, often blind to the intricacy and subtlety of complex issues, tend to pounce on the oddity of an event, the entertaining thing that viewers or readers can instantly digest. In this case I was the oddity, and in the two-dimensional universe of print or broadcast



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HOUSTON CITY MAGAZINE 97

UCC
054022



BY LEE HOCHBERG

SHADOW OVER BRAZOSPORT

Sixty miles south of Houston lies a bucolic coastal community with a thriving economy and the trappings of the good life.

There's just one problem.

On July 4, 1976, Joe and Laura Tod of Lake Jackson went over to the center of town to ring the Bicentennial Bell as part of the holiday ceremony. Joe started ringing it. He wouldn't stop.

Mrs. Tod, then in her early fifties, asked Joe to stop ringing the bell. She said it was too loud and was bothering other holiday celebrants. Joe, 58, smiled at her eerily and went on ringing.

For the next two weeks, Joe Tod, who had worked for 35 years at the Dow Chemical plant in nearby Freeport, behaved irrationally. He ran stop signs. He drove on the wrong side of the road, veering only when oncoming cars were about to smash into him. Then

one day he began vomiting. He was rushed to Houston's Methodist Hospital, where doctors offered a frightening diagnosis: Tod had glioblastoma, a rare and fast-growing brain tumor that four times in five presages a quick and painful death. Four days later, brain surgeons operated on him.

Curiously, Tod had familiar company in Methodist's neurosurgery ward that summer. Two other Dow employees were undergoing surgery for the same form of brain cancer, and several others from Dow had nonmalignant brain tumors. Still more residents of the Freeport-Lake Jackson area were being treated for other forms of cancer. One widow of a Dow worker in Methodist with glioblastoma at the time remembers that "the cancer seemed like it was all around you if you lived in that area." Before developing

Former Houstonian Lee Hochberg works for radio station KCBS in San Francisco.

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*'Seems like every time
you turn around,
someone you know
is getting cancer,'
one widow says.*

brain cancer, her husband, Jerry Miller, had worked in the magnesium cells, where an electric current is used to break down magnesium chloride into the metal magnesium and chlorine gas. He died later that autumn at the age of 38. Joe Tod died of brain cancer in February 1977.

Last summer, the federal government reported a startling discovery: at least 25 former Dow employees had died of brain cancer over the last 40 years. That is a figure epidemiologists call statistically significant; it is twice the rate among Brazoria County residents not employed at Dow.

Brazosport, where the mouth of the Brazos River empties into the Gulf of Mexico south of Houston, is a slick name for nine interlocking communities that serve as hometowns for several thousand chemical workers in Freeport. "It's Texas' fastest-growing industrial complex," trumpets the local chamber of commerce, and the statistics bear that out—the area's population has doubled since 1960, to over 63,000, and is concentrated in neighboring Lake Jackson, Freeport, and Clute. The population is expected to double again by the year 2000.

The hub of the area is Dow Chemical. Known best as the maker of Saran Wrap, Handi-Wrap, Ziploc food storage bags, and Styrofoam, the company actually earned most of its \$9.2 billion in 1979 by selling chemicals to other industrial companies. Most of those chemicals are produced at Dow's largest facility, the Texas Division plant in Brazosport. One of the toughest, best-managed, and fastest-growing companies in one of the world's most competitive industries, Dow ranks 21st in the *Forbes* 500.

It is not enough to say that Dow is the dominant economic force in Brazosport. In fact, Brazosport was essentially created by Dow. In the 1930s, the company recognized that the adjoining 15-mile stretch of coast was the only piece of frontal mainland in Texas—the only piece of shoreline without an estuarine system, without salt marshes, without barrier islands to restrict the flow of seawater, which is used for cooling and as a source of magnesium and chlorine. Dow pounced on this geographical peculiarity, completing its huge Texas Division plant in Freeport by 1940 and importing workers by the thousands. Other chemical companies followed, as did 90 percent of the area's cur-

rent population. Today the 4,500-acre Dow complex includes five electrical generating plants and a 500-mile network of pipelines. Brazosport has become the fifth-largest income-producing community in Texas; 14 chemical companies, led by Dow, account for half that wealth.

Dow has even had its hands in the architecture of the area: back in 1942, Alden Dow of the original Dow family planned the area's most populous town, Lake Jackson—a pleasant place that looks like Houston's Meyerland, plopped peacefully down on the flat Gulf Coast in the shadows of Dow's belching smokestacks.

Only 60 miles from Houston's frenzy, Brazosport is surprisingly bucolic. The evening exodus along Highway 332 from the Dow plant toward Lake Jackson is not so much a rush as a slow and steady spread toward home. Off to the left, set far from the highway, lies the west end of Dow's ten-mile-long complex; to the right, chain hotels rise from open fields; dead ahead are the dying remains of a spectacular orange Texas sunset, enhanced by some airborne emission. Above all there's a feeling of wide-open space and a countrified, satisfied mood as the evening lights begin to sparkle within the Dow plant.

Last May 30, a headline in the local newspaper, the *Brazosport Facts*, warned area residents, "Brain Cancer Deaths Higher Than Normal." The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and its research arm, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), had been conducting an investigation that would eventually turn up 18 brain cancer cases at the Union Carbide plant in Texas City, five at Monsanto in Texas City, and several more among workers at Texaco, Gulf, and Mobil plants in Beaumont and Port Arthur. The agencies were curious about Brazoria County records indicating that several Dow employees had died of brain cancer, and both the agencies and Dow had set out to examine the problem. Dow's report conceded that, indeed, at least 13 of its workers had died of brain cancer since 1961.

Although Dow assured its employees that "there is little evidence to suggest a relationship exists between occupational exposure to chemical agents and an increased risk of brain cancer," the company made a curiously contradictory acknowledgment: that workers faced an increased risk of contracting glioblastoma, a highly malignant and fatal form of brain cancer, if they were exposed to chlorine, hydrogen chloride, magnesium, or magnesium oxide.

Jimmie Robinson's first husband, Jerry Miller, worked eight years in Dow's magnesium cells before dying that autumn of 1976 at age 38. "He thought Dow was the most fantastic place in the world," his widow recalls. "He was happy in his job."

Miller was so happy in his job, in fact, that two or three times every week he would work a double shift of 16 hours in those magnesium cells. He did that until April 1976, when he began developing what he thought were sinus headaches. Often the headaches were so bad that he told his wife he wasn't sure he could go to work.

"This was a man who loved to work, loved to make money," Robinson says in a comfortable Texas drawl. "His idea was to let him do everything. What he really cared about was bringing home money for the family. We had the perfect family life."

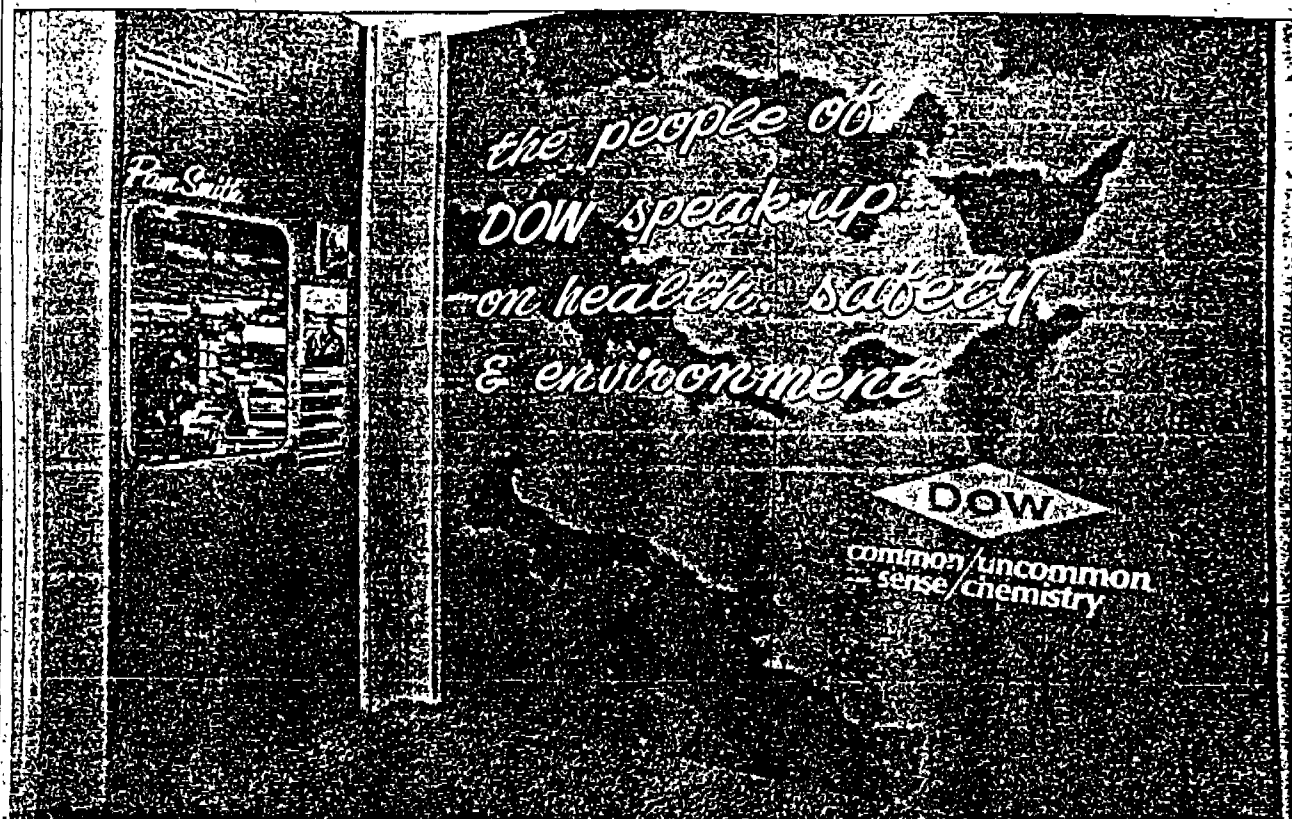
Miller's last day of work was May 1. His driving was getting erratic, he had bouts with vomiting, and he gradually began dragging his left leg when he walked. The Millers had no family doctor—they had always been healthy—and the general practitioner they consulted in Angleton diagnosed only a sinus infection. A few days later, sitting at the kitchen table, Miller asked his wife for a glass of milk. One already sat in front of him, slightly off to the left. Recognizing that something was wrong, the couple rushed to Methodist Hospital in Houston, where a neurologist detected the tumor.

"Later Jerry admitted to me that he had had no feeling in his left foot for quite a while but had been embarrassed to complain," his widow confides. "And I remembered once he had been riding a bicycle and showed up without his left shoe—he couldn't remember what had happened to it. That must have happened a couple of times. He didn't understand what was happening."

Doctors tried brain surgery and radiation treatments during the summer of 1976. By



Texas Division PR manager Jim Hansen says Dow employees 'don't have a high level of concern about brain cancer.'



A display at Dow's Texas Division headquarters in Brazosport.

autumn it was clear that Miller wouldn't survive. "Probably the most painful thing for us," Mrs. Robinson says, "was watching this strong and proud man who had worked so hard for his family—and his company—revert to being like a little child. It was such a pitiful sight." Miller lapsed into a coma and died early in November.

Miller's widow-remarried two years later. Her second husband, who works in Dow's paint department, used to work in the very same magnesium cells Jerry Miller had worked in.

"Seems like every time you turn around, someone you know is getting some sort of cancer around here," Mrs. Robinson says, settling onto the sofa in the den of her Angleton home. "You rack your brain looking for an answer. Maybe they spray the rice fields around here with something, or maybe it's the kind of foods we eat in this area. But I don't think Jerry or I ever connected his problem with Dow."

Their two daughters, 13-year-old Michelle and nine-year-old Vicki, have come away from their father's death with an awareness of health their parents perhaps didn't have. "Vicki went into hysterics recently when her stepfather pricked himself with a catfish fin," Mrs. Robinson says. "She really thought he was going to die. And she's always asking whether things are poison."

Mrs. Robinson herself isn't asking that question. "You can always smell the chemi-

cals in the air here," she says. "I'd never had sinus headaches before I moved here in 1971, but I've had them ever since." Then a pause, and an innocent smile. "If I take enough Sine-Aid, I can usually get rid of them."

Jimmie Robinson says she is very happy where she is.

Nobody is really sure what that smell in the air over Brazoria County is. Most Houstonians who drive the area or the marshy, barren stretch of the Gulf Freeway alongside the work-horse refineries of Texas City are familiar with the odor—an acrid, pungent, almost sweet smell that suggests the making of plastics. For a brief moment just before dark the air assumes an oh-so-subtle green hue, and on those cold, misty, miserable nights that are the mark of a Gulf Coast winter, unmistakable traces of chlorine waft inland on the chilling air. "In the past it has been suggested that a number of plants in this area clear their stacks at night, when people are less likely to complain," notes Pat Buffler, associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Texas School of Public Health. Emissions from these stacks, Buffler says, may contain known or suspected carcinogens such as vinyl chloride, trichloroethylene, and perchlorethylene (Brazoria County is a national leader in production of certain carcinogenic chlorinated hydrocarbons). In concert with the county's high concentra-

tion of solvents, the chemicals make Brazosport's "pollutant mix" unique even to petrochemical-producing regions.

Not until last April did OSHA/NIOSH investigators examining the Texas City brain cancer problem stumble onto Brazoria County and Dow's seemingly high rate of brain cancer. The NIOSH study found the risk of a Dow employee's developing the cancer twice that of other Brazoria County residents, the same twofold risk detected among petrochemical employees in Texas City and Beaumont/Port Arthur.

Just what that finding means, however, is a hot epidemiological question. "Are the chemicals in the Dow workplace causing cancer?" Buffler asks. "Or could Dow's health-insured population be receiving better medical care, more accurate diagnoses of the tumors, and, in turn, a more accurate labeling of cause of death on their death certificates than the public at large?"

"The mark of good epidemiology is the teasing away of all these other factors in order to arrive at some definitive statement about causality," Buffler explains. "It would be irresponsible to put too much fear into the employees right now—just as it would be irresponsible to minimize the statistic. Some serious epidemiology still needs to be done."

Such epidemiology began with the NIOSH study and continued with Dow's acknowledgment in May that an unusually



Rocky Holden had the first of two malignant brain tumors in 1970. He takes 18 pills a day to control the cancer.

high number (13) of its employees had died of brain cancer since 1961—but then somehow detoured into a textbook case of a government-versus-industry occupational safety squabble. At a May meeting in Freeport, the OSHA/NIOSH team requested broad access to Dow's personnel records, hoping to relate a specific job assignment to the cancer; Dow flatly refused, demanding (according to a company newsletter) that the investigators follow "a strict protocol which would protect any Dow trade secret information . . . and insure Dow employees their privacy and protection of their individual rights." NIOSH investigators were incensed with Dow; officials at Union Carbide in Texas City had fully cooperated. The government didn't hide its annoyance, lamenting in an official press statement that "NIOSH/OSHA plans . . . to determine which jobs or chemical exposures can be associated with the disease are stymied by Dow's non-cooperation."

Tensions mounted throughout the summer, as further government studies increased the Dow brain cancer death count to 25 since the plant's opening in 1941 and noted that "it is very likely that a large proportion of Dow's former employees have left the area and a number of them have since died of a brain tumor." Dow epidemiologists privately embarked on their own case-control study, which, in their interpretation, indicated that the number of brain tumor deaths was actu-

ally no greater than could be expected in a working population the size of Dow's.

"That's not true," retorts Buffler, normally a moderate scientist and not one to go on the attack. "There is a correlation [between brain cancer and chemical exposure], but we don't know what it means. We don't know that it's causal."

"You go after the truth in a matter like this, not whitewash it," Buffler says. "You don't put your head in the sand."

Meanwhile, a five-part television series on Ted Turner's Cable News Network examined what several area doctors were beginning to call a "brain cancer epidemic" along the Texas coast. Then-congressman Bob Eckhardt took up the cause and accused Dow officials of blocking a complete investigation by NIOSH. He ordered his House commerce subcommittee on oversight and investigations to begin a major investigation of Dow and the area's "epidemic levels" of brain cancer.

Faced with such negative news, Dow shifted gear in late July. For the first time it went public with its own epidemiological results. Only two months earlier the company had acknowledged that the brain cancer death rate was higher than expected, but on July 28 a memo informed all 7,000 Texas Division employees and the press that "there is nothing . . . indicating that the number of deaths due to brain cancer in the total work population is above the expected norm for a

population of that size."

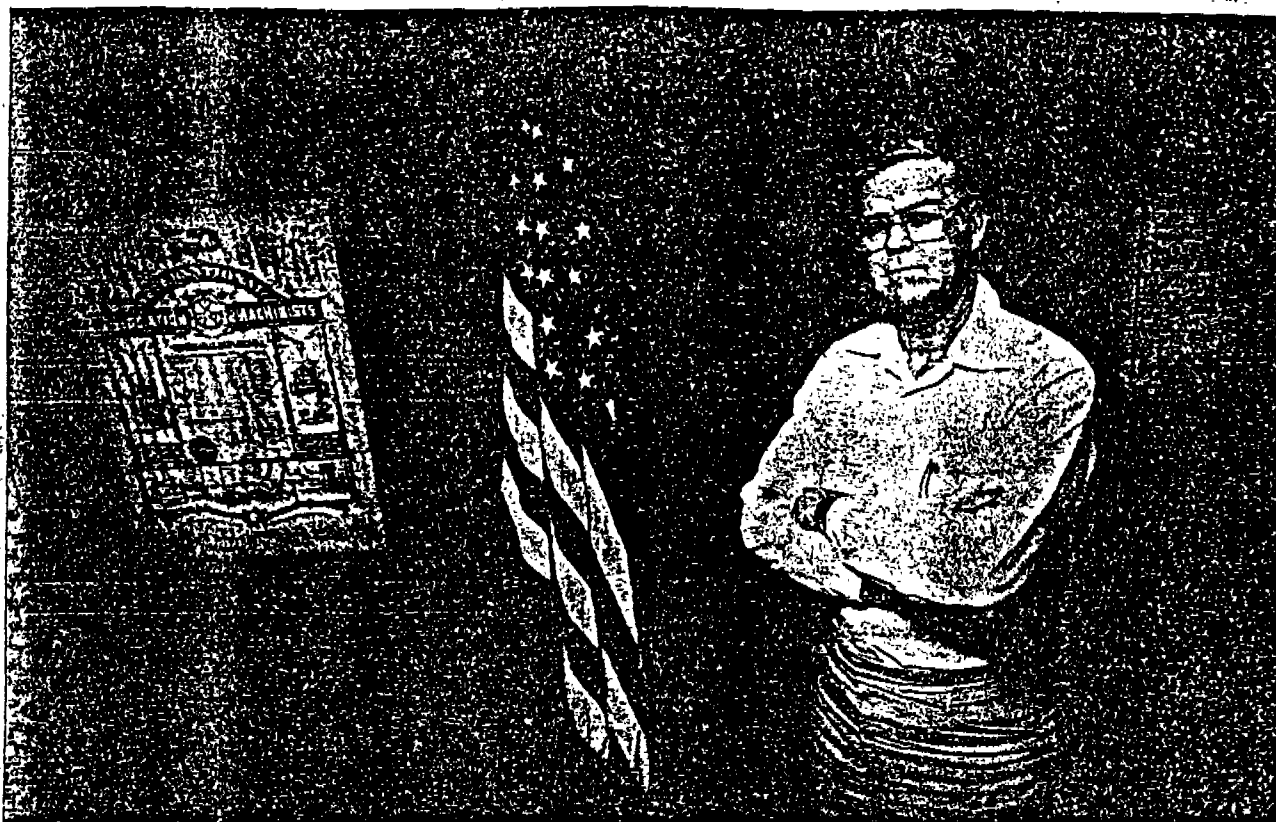
Buffler responds, "If I were an intelligent widow, I would have been troubled by that statement." In fact, whether the company had planned it that way or not, what had begun as an exercise in epidemiology seemed to be fast becoming a well-orchestrated program in public relations.

Dow public relations manager Jim Hansen wearily escorts me to a plush office in the Dow complex. It is a cold, dark, and windy Friday night. Hansen has been in Austin all day. The meeting begins in the fluorescent lighting and stony silence of an empty building.

"We've had some real problems with press coverage of this brain cancer thing," Hansen begins, running a hand over his graying, slicked-back hair. "It hasn't been easy keeping this panic from our employees."

Hansen is a big, solid man, but as he tilts back his throne-like rocking chair, its thick cushions seem to envelop him. Kicking his feet onto his desk, he looks around at the richly furnished office and sighs. His yellow Lacoste sweater hangs open to expose a red Lacoste shirt that covers a healthy belly.

"I think our employees have a pretty high level of awareness about what the media are trying to do, how they're trying to sensationalize this brain cancer story," Hansen says. "Dow employees know that, so they don't



Union representative O. D. Kenemore worked with vinyl chloride for years. 'Nobody ever told me it was dangerous,' he says.

have a high level of concern about brain cancer. I hope some of the material we've released from this office has helped keep that concern low."



Holden thinks he's beaten the cancer for the second time, and has only suspicions of its cause.

The word on brain cancer coming out of Dow has been by no means haphazard. Since the onslaught of media attention brought on by the Cable News report in July, every public statement from Dow personnel concerning the cancer has been rigorously funneled through the public relations office. When I called Dow's safety director, for instance, he said he was unable to talk and suggested that I call either the industrial medicine director or public relations director; in the time it took me to hang up the phone and redial those two sources, both had been advised to expect a call. It was as though an alarm had sounded. And within ten minutes Hansen had been contacted in Austin by the home office in Freeport and had called me back.

"There's been so much utter garbage printed about this cancer that we make sure everyone goes through us before talking to the press," Hansen explains. "It's not a medical epidemic, it's a media epidemic."

Dow has issued memos to its employees and has installed television screens throughout the plant to broadcast closed-circuit films on cancer. Two films shown throughout July emphatically presented Dow's new stance on the brain tumor question: Dow's brain cancer total is not above the expected norm for a work population of its size. In fact, the second film suggests that the 25 deaths may actually be fewer than expected in a population that size. ("But this was based on some irresponsible statistical manipulations," asserts

Cancer is nature's way of eliminating sexually effete individuals, a Dow ally testified at an OSHA hearing.

Buffler. "They made all the conservative assumptions and came out with an unrealistically high expected incidence of tumors. You can monkey around with figures and get them to say what you want.") The films were repeated at 30-minute intervals on given days throughout the month, reaching, by Hansen's estimate, about one-third of Dow's 7,000 Texas Division employees.

A third film, shown 25 times during the week of December 8-12, achieved even greater saturation—as much as 70 percent of the Dow staff, according to Hansen. Titled *Report on Cancer—Can We Reduce the Risk?*, it was produced by the American Industrial Health Council (AIHC), a trade association of 110 American companies chaired until recently by Paul Oreffice, the president of Dow Chemical. The council was created in the late 1970s specifically to represent industry in ongoing OSHA attempts to regulate carcinogens in the workplace. Startling-

Dow's public relations chief opines, 'It will be pretty hard for us to take any of the blame for this.'

ly, an AIHC representative in 1979 testified before OSHA that cancer is of *positive benefit* to the human species. "Cancer," Dr. Francis J. C. Roe suggested, "is probably one of nature's ways of eliminating sexually effete individuals who would otherwise, in nature's view, compete for available food resources without advantage to the species as a whole."

The AIHC film shown to Dow employees in December was not quite so laudatory about cancer's role in toughening up the species. Still, it emphatically insisted that chemicals—and the chemical industry—are not responsible for the nation's soaring cancer rate. An authoritative-looking man begins the narration, musing, "Sometimes it seems everything we eat, everything we drink, even the air we breathe has been called a carcinogen. The fear worries us at home, it worries us on the job. But what causes cancer? Today you will hear from three authorities—you'll find they have pretty much the same thing to say." The three cancer researchers, repeatedly referred to as "experts" and "recognized authorities" in the 20-minute film, drive home three points:

- "The causes of cancer are quite simple"—excess smoking, drinking, eating, and exposure to sunlight;
- Less than 5 percent of U.S. cancer cases are related to occupational exposure, and those are due entirely to exposures 20 to 30 years ago (this ignores the obvious question: what will happen 20 to 30 years from now as a result of current exposures?); and
- "All unnecessary risks in the workplace have already been eliminated." Any additional occupational health controls would mean "plant shutdowns and loss of jobs."

Throughout the film, the narrator asserts that "Americans are confused about the causes of cancer," that they are "convinced that cancer is reaching epidemic proportions, despite what the 'experts' say." For this state of affairs he blames "constant media attention" and the "so-called consumer advocate groups attached in some way to Ralph Nader." And at one point, as the narrator frets that "many people are convinced that virtually EVERYTHING causes cancer . . . despite what we have heard from these recognized authorities," the camera zooms in on three women doing their weekly shopping in a grocery store. The third, a middle-aged woman, is curiously eyeing a display of feminine napkins and tampons.

"Dow has always been open with its employees," PR chief Hansen says, "so they trust us. We've had some alarm in our newer employees about this brain cancer, and some of the wives of the new employees have called in; I guess lots of our guys go home and don't tell their wives what we've told them at the plant. I'm sure, though, that on the whole there's a low level of concern."

A steady barrage of internal news releases continues. One, headlined "Dow Sets Record Straight on Brain Cancer Allegations," quotes Dow's vice-president for health and environmental sciences: "Earlier reports of a possibly higher than normal brain cancer rate among Dow's Texas Division employees distorted the data available and jumped to a conclusion not substantiated by the facts." The statement seems to ignore Dow's own earlier acknowledgment that its brain cancer rate was higher than expected. And in December the *Dow Texan*, a magazine sent to almost 9,000 current and retired Dow employees, told of "gross distortion and misrepresentation of the data" by the Cable News Network, described as a new network "just launching its programming" that had chosen "to dramatize the brain cancer subject." The *Texan* again insisted, "There is no increased risk of brain cancer among employees at the Texas Division."

I ask Hansen whether he, as a company spokesman, feels any concern or responsibility for cancer victims, their families, or any as yet undiscovered victims who might have moved away from Brazoria County before dying of brain cancer. Rather than respond to the question, Hansen notes a striking epidemiological finding: 68 percent of the known brain cancer victims were employed at Dow between 1942 and 1944, and 56 percent were at Dow from 1947 to 1952.

"Even if we find that the cause was some chemical process in the plant," he says, "chances are if you go to that spot in the plant, the process will have changed since 1942. . . . There just isn't a hell of a lot you can do about it anymore." Hansen pauses a moment, glances around the warm, wood-paneled office, takes his feet down from the desk, and begins buttoning up his sweater. "It's not something you can suddenly reach back and beat your breast over and say how terrible we were," he says. Finally, Hansen flashes a disarming smile. He opines, "It will be pretty hard for us to take any of the blame for this." I leave Hansen with a handshake and walk out the stone-silent halls.

Up Highway 36 about 15 miles in West Columbia, I meet Dow employee Rocky Holden, his wife, Kathy, and his two children, 14-year-old Jerry and 10-year-old Deanna. We cluster around the dinner table for a plateful of Rocky's homemade burritos. The family talk is easy and unforced. Deanna excitedly reports that she has gotten her fifth-grade pictures today; Jerry, meanwhile, says

he is aching to get onto a basketball court and out of school for Christmas break.

One subject that does not make its way to the dinner table is that a brain tumor lies inside Rocky Holden's head.

Holden is in his late thirties, tall and trim, perhaps skinny. The dark hair on his head is barely growing back after last summer's radiation therapy. He has an astrocytoma, a slow-growing, malignant brain tumor that is not as deadly as the glioblastomas that killed other Dow employees. That is why Holden is here to talk.

The kids clear out after dinner and he begins his story on his favorite corner of his favorite sofa, ever so slowly, sometimes losing his train of thought or struggling for the word he thinks used to come easier to him. "I wish this wouldn't happen," he says as his mind goes blank. Remarkably, though, he shows few other signs of frustration. He explains it this way.

"My son dropped and broke one of my glasses before dinner," he says. "I guess I could have yelled at him or gotten mad. But what's done is done. So instead I said, 'Jerry, guess you better pick up the pieces.'"

Holden first went to work in Dow's labor pool in 1967, a role that took him to all sections of the plant. "If you ask me what I've been exposed to, I can't answer," he says quietly, shrugging. But he remembers his first three months in the pool working with soda ash, a very rough caustic that he says had him sneezing constantly. "The little masks they gave us weren't nearly good enough," he says, "and it was like having a terrible cold."

Why did he tolerate these conditions?

"I was a brand-new employee," he re-



'They're a cold-blooded bunch of people,' H. F. Miller says of the company's medical managers.



H. F. Miller retired early from Dow seven years after being knocked unconscious by a blast of chlorine gas.

plies. "I didn't think to complain."

From there it was three months in the magnesium plant, working around a sulfur compound that Holden says "took the oxygen out of you. It took 20 minutes to get over it." He moved on to the hazardous ethylene diamine area of the plant, where he saw "one guy who lost lots of weight working with the stuff." Holden wanted to hold on to what weight he had, so he began pursuing a craft. By 1969 he had earned an apprenticeship as a pipefitter.

"I had a chance to see how the workers felt about chemicals," he says matter-of-factly. Once his apprenticeship brought him to an area of the plant where vats of glycerin were handy. Glycerin, a sweet liquid obtained from fats and oils, is used as a solvent, antifreeze fluid, plasticizer, and sweetener, and in the manufacture of dynamite, cosmetics, liquid soaps, inks, and lubricants. "The guys used to heat up the stuff, drop rings of it into the vats, and make glycerin 'doughnuts,'" he remembers. "Then they'd eat them for breakfast or lunch."

Late in 1969 Holden began acting strangely. He had laughing spells for no apparent reason, and tears flowed from his eyes. His friends told him to see a psychiatrist. Carpooling to work one morning, he told a story, broke into unchecked laughter, passed out, and woke up in the Dow Industrial Medicine Facility. By early 1970 doctors had removed what they thought was the entirety

of a tumor in Rocky Holden's brain.

Holden later went back to work, passed his pipefitter test in 1973, and worked at his craft throughout the decade. In 1979, however, he began suffering seizures on the job and was forced to move to the less dangerous valve shop. In 1980 he began taking radiation therapy for a newly active brain tumor. His doctors gave him a 50-50 chance for survival.

Today, 18 pills each day help keep Holden alive, employed, and apparently feeling well, if sluggish and slow to react. He thinks he has beaten the cancer for a second time and has only suspicions about its cause.

"Dow might be aware of something causing all this," he says easily, "and sure, I'd like to know more about what is really going on. But I'm just a pipefitter. It's not as though I'm Mr. Super Safety. I'm not in a position to know, or do anything about it."

Holden remembers once going to a Lake Jackson doctor for treatment of an arm rash and asking the doctor what might have caused it. "'Dow didn't do it!' the doctor started telling me," Holden recalls. "'Dow didn't do it! Dow's my bread and butter!' I hadn't even asked him if it was work-related."

"But that's the way it is," Holden says. "I trust Dow to a point. Beyond that, it's out of my power."

Deanna and Jerry Holden come out to the den and shoot a few games of pool with the guest. Then it's Rocky's turn. The kids gaze

admiringly at the man they know is the house "pro," but both they and their father are surprised when I run the table. As the eight ball drops into the side pocket, Rocky's face suddenly means business, and he steps menacingly toward me. Tension fills the room. "One thing about this brain tumor," Rocky growls, "is that it makes my temper act real funny." He takes one more step toward me. Then both he and his children break into mile-wide grins. Rocky Holden has not lost his sense of humor.

If there is any crack in the wall of acceptance that is Brazosport, the best place to find it is at the local union halls. Union boss O. D. Kenemore says he is not alarmed by the discovery of brain tumors at Dow, but only because he worked there 22 years—and saw a lot worse.

"The standing rule at the plant," says Kenemore, president of two local labor councils and business manager of the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Local No. 390 in Freeport, "is to never get enough of any fumes to make you fall down. Otherwise, any exposure is okay."

Kenemore came to Dow in 1951 and spent six weeks in a labor pool before advancing to his permanent job as a pipefitter. His first assignment was in Plant A, where vinyl chloride is made. He retired in 1973 to become a full-time labor representative.

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After the 1979 season, when McMullen decided to go after free agent Nolan Ryan, Smith thought the price too high and feared for the salary structure, but McMullen, with fanfare, signed Ryan anyway; Smith was displeased. Smith initially frowned upon McMullen's query regarding drafting free agent Joe Morgan, but later, as McMullen saw it, basked in the media's approving spotlight when Morgan was signed; McMullen was miffed. The new ownership of the New York Mets asked McMullen's permission to talk to Smith about a job, but McMullen flatly refused; Smith was miffed. And so it went.

These were not the private boardroom skirmishes of the business world, quietly
(continued on page 124)

BRAZOSPORT

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Unlike Rocky Holden, Kenemore seems almost ashamed of the tales he tells. "All those years working with vinyl chloride," he says, shaking his head, "and nobody ever told me it was dangerous."

Kenemore remembers back in 1953, when he would wake up at night in panic, unable to breathe. Sometimes during the day he and other employees would have difficulty exhaling. He says he went to the company doctor, who told him not to worry about exhaling, that *inhaling* was the important thing. "And he told me," Kenemore recalls, "that even if I passed out, I could be dragged out of the plant and regain consciousness before long."

"Nothing was barred in those days," Kenemore says with a grimace. "Workers had their bare hands in the chemicals, and nobody thought anything of it."

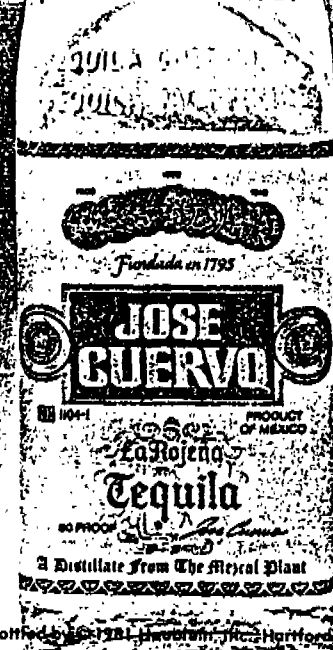
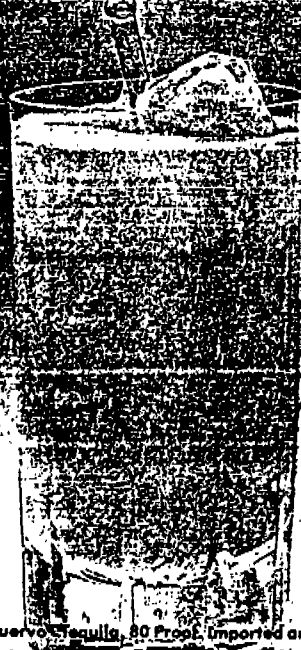
Some conditions at Dow have improved since 1953, Kenemore is quick to point out. But as he sees it, the corporate attitude has never changed. "I have tried to get the company to place small cards on equipment warning repairmen of particular dangers in certain areas of the plant," he says. "Dow refuses. They say, 'You knew this wasn't an ice cream plant when you came to work here.' " But in truth, many employees do *not* realize the dangers they will face when they come to work at Dow.

H. F. Miller worked 23 years as a rigger at Dow before poor health forced him to retire in 1975 at the age of 58. Now he putters around his Lake Jackson home or pals with friends at the union hall. A glance at his face shows he has paid his dues. Miller has a huge, round head and a crew cut. The creased skin on his face and neck is so distinctive that he looks like an Oliphant cartoon caricature of a hardened, grizzled roughneck.

In 1968 Miller was knocked unconscious by a sudden blast of chlorine gas at the plant. He was taken to the Dow Industrial Medicine Facility. Electrocardiograms were taken, and

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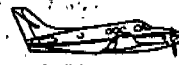
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he was placed on oxygen overnight. He spent the next three days there.

Two years later, when he began having severe chest and arm pains, his personal doctor sent him to a Galveston hospital for two weeks, then to Houston for an arteriogram that found a badly damaged heart muscle and circulation problems.

"The doc asked me when I'd had my heart attack," Miller says in seeming disbelief at his own experience. "I said I hadn't had any heart attack. 'The hell you didn't,' the doc said. 'You had a severe heart attack at one time—and you would have felt it when it happened.'"

Miller thought back to when he had been overcome by the chlorine fumes; that was the only time he could remember that he might have had a heart attack and not known it. His cardiologist asked Dow for the electrocardiogram and medical records from Miller's three-day stay. "But they told him they had no records of my ever being there," Miller says. Federal law requires Dow to retain all employee medical records for the duration of the employee's tenure at the company. But William Fishbeck, Dow's Texas Division medical director, admits, "It is not unusual for us to look back and not find a particular event."

In 1974, six years after his Dow accident, Miller underwent triple-bypass heart surgery in Houston. "They're a cold-blooded bunch of people," he now says of Dow's medical and health management. "They play everything like they're afraid people are going to get to them. They make you feel guilty—even if you complain of a backache, they try to make it seem like you did something to your back on your own time."

The stories pour out of this union hall: of a Dow employee electrocuted by supposedly faulty equipment on the job, and subsequent claims of collusion by Dow and local authorities to blame the accident on an unrelated heart attack; of lost or missing medical records; of still more employees in their last days of fights against all forms of cancer.

Jake Willis of Freeport worked 27 years at Dow before retiring in 1979. An outgoing and relaxed sort, he doesn't seem to have any ax to grind. But his message is clear. "No, they don't WANT to kill you—that's killing themselves, that's killing their company," he says. "It's almost as if they talk themselves into believing that they're doing the right thing, that there really is no danger."

In an analytic rather than accusatory fashion, union representative Kenemore discusses Dow's top brass. "Dow is a terribly competitive, overzealous place, even within its own ranks," he says. "Those managers would throw a rock in front of one another to get ahead. The company gets so wrapped up in itself that it begins to think it is the law, that it must defend itself from everything and everybody who would cause problems."

Kenemore paints a portrait of a town born and raised on chemicals, its faith in chemicals reinforced daily by a seemingly benevolent corporate parent. One thinks back to Laura Tod, widow of Joe Tod. Joe worked from 1941 to 1946—the same years as did two-thirds of Dow's brain cancer victims—in Dow's acid and caustic plants before moving to the employee relations office, where he worked for the next 29 years. In 1974 a letter Joe wrote to the company was published in Dow's annual report. Mrs. Tod proudly shows off her copy. The letter begins, "How can I express to you what it means to work for a company like Dow?" Two years later he was dead from a brain tumor.

"Dow was wonderful to my husband," Mrs. Tod now says. "And I wouldn't clean my bathroom if I didn't trust chemicals."

"This town has grown up believing that if Dow were to fold, then the community would fold," Kenemore explains. "That means the industry as well as the Weingarten's that supplies goods for industrial employees. In Brazosport, the average man is simply afraid to make too much noise."

Yet if there is tragedy in Brazosport (and most townfolk will assure you there is not), it goes beyond the residents' not knowing or caring about possible dangers around them. It may be, instead, that many *do* know what is around them but are too proud—or too afraid—to talk about it. There's Rocky Holden, who thinks back to his laughing spells and ponders, "Can you imagine, thinking you need to see a psychiatrist?" There's Jerry Miller, who kept losing his left shoe but was too embarrassed to complain. There's H. F. Miller, who today has a friend at Dow with brain cancer who is "as ashamed of that as I would be about VD." And then there's Jack Stone.

On the surface, Jack Stone's story is not unlike Joe Tod's or Jerry Miller's, or those of the other 22 Dow employees who died of brain cancer. It is told by his widow, Mary Stone, a charming woman who wears her 50-plus years with exceptional grace. Her clothes are immaculate, the living room in her Freeport home spotless and tasteful.

Jack Stone worked at Dow for almost 34 years, first in the chlorine cells, later as a boilermaker. In his later years he really wanted only one thing—to retire with Mary, who herself had just retired after 30 years with the phone company.

"He was really bent on retiring so we could spend some time together," Mary says. "He used to come home and tell me all of his plans, where we would go, what we would do."

Like Tod and Miller and Holden, Stone truly enjoyed his job, according to Mary. But he did have a bad back. She remembers him "going to work sometimes so hunched

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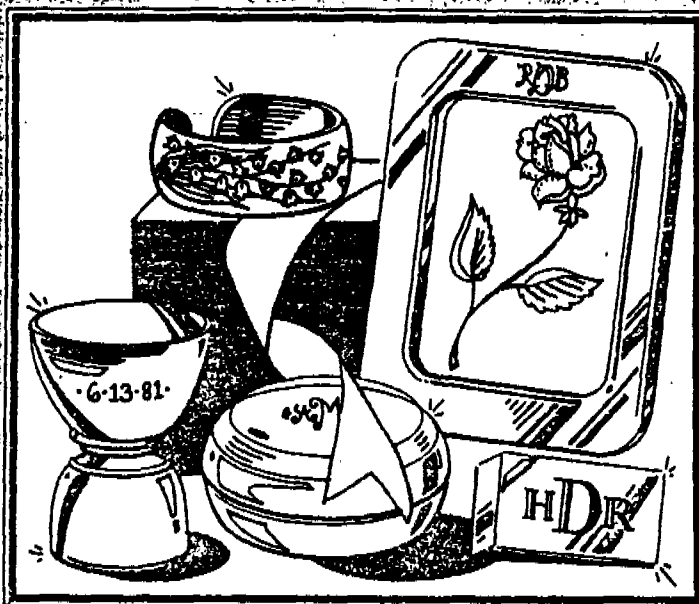
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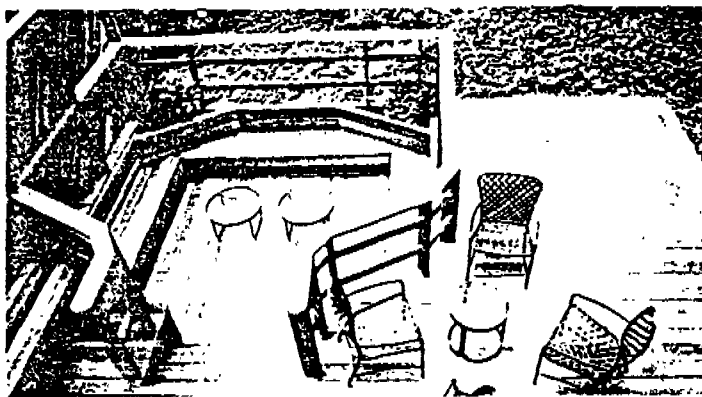


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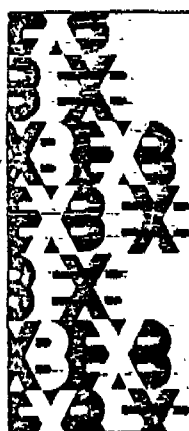


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up he looked like a freak." Doctors said he had a deteriorating disc, but there wasn't much they could do about it. Mary says he never complained.

In June 1976 Stone's personality began changing. "He would talk constantly," his wife says, squinting her eyes as if fascinated by the recollection. "He never used to talk much about what went on at work, but now he'd come home and talk all the time about safety. He was hooked on it. I told him safety was the supervisors' job, but he said he couldn't stand to see other people getting hurt all the time. And he would just talk on and on."

When Stone went in for a back checkup, Dow's medical staff took note of his behavior and sent him to a psychologist, then to a psychiatrist. "Everybody thinks I'm crazy," Stone told his wife with a laugh.

On June 24 Dow's industrial medicine physician, on a routine check of Stone's aching back, saw in Stone's behavior something he didn't like. He apparently told Stone he was suffering from "tension." That same afternoon, Stone was admitted to Brazosport's Community Hospital.

Jack Stone's story is different from those of other Dow employees because he left behind a personal diary. Inside are glimpses of a man Mary Stone today admits she never knew. As he entered the hospital, Stone, unaware of the tumor within his brain and unaware that others would soon see his private thoughts, recorded fears and worries that only he, as a boilermaker at Dow Chemical in Brazosport, would know.

Thursday, June 24—Industrial Medicine Appointment. They didn't even give me heat treatment??? I tried to explain that first things should come first. He say that back trouble would come later—but I need to get treatment for other problem in hospital. . . . I say I'm going to check in hospital, but I need to go to shop—change clothes, give car keys to Rider. He say they don't want me in plant right now. . . . All of sudden, two nurses come hurrying in, wrap arm around me and lead me out. . . . I'm escorted to Community Hospital. All this escorting and rushing me in hospital hurt me, and excited me more than anything in my life. . . . What I couldn't understand—why no heat treatment, why all this escorting??? Talk about tension!!!! All this really shook me up. . . . this was terrible way to start treating me for tension, or whatever. . . . This was the most ridiculous going on I have ever experienced. . . . Actually, the way I've been treated on job—my tension naturally high—this should be called a job related illness—The way I was treated—naturally create tensions. ????????

Friday, June 25, morning—I still say my tension and whatever—was brought on by the way I have been treated, and should be on Industrial sick leave —????? I wanted to be on Ind. sick leave, see my family doctor, and let him recommend a psychologist to see—but [the company doctor] say no. . . .

Friday, June 25, afternoon—Industrial sick leave? The way I've been treated over the last years —enough to cause anyone tension or whatever. . . . I was being downgraded for talking and visiting