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Death prompts mother to speak out

In a brutally honest obituary, a mom recounts Rapid City woman's death due to drinking

Daniel Simmons-Ritchie
Journal staff

Erin Wagman was a painter, a cyclist and the mother of a 9-year-old boy.

She was also an alcoholic, and that addiction eventually overrode all the good things in her life.

Two weeks ago, at the age of 42, Wagman died of acute alcohol poisoning at a friend's apartment in Rapid City.

Wagman's life, and her needless death, were captured by her

mother, Deborah Wagman, on Oct. 24 in one of the most well-read obituaries to ever appear on the Rapid City Journal website.

"She died alone," the obituary states, beginning a 452-word eulogy that is as blunt as it is poignant.

"Surely Erin's descent into alcoholism happened incrementally," the obituary reads. "But most of us witnessed just the final four years, the point at which she had fallen so deep that she couldn't be reached."



This week, Deborah, 61, agreed to talk about Erin, her struggle with alcoholism, and why she wrote Erin's obituary the honest way she did.

Speaking from Lawrence, Kan., where she works as a freelance food writer, Deborah said she was

Erin Wagman died on Oct. 19 from acute alcohol poisoning in Rapid City. Her mother, Deborah, hopes that her daughter's death and a very honest newspaper obituary will be instructive for alcoholics and those with alcoholic family members. **Courtesy photo**

trying to write succinctly, wary of the cost per word, but also unabashedly.

Deborah said there was a temptation to gloss over a person's life when they die — to recount "white petticoats and sunsets and fields of daisies" — but she wanted to express something more.

"I wanted to talk to people like

me, but also the alcoholics," she said. "Maybe those who still have time to grab a grip."

Early independence

Deborah gave birth to Erin in Rapid City when she was 18. It was January 15, 1971. It proceeded a wild time for the young mother, who was navigating a swirl of hippie counter-culture. Deborah didn't know who Erin's father was.

Erin was a child who exhibited independence from an early age; she stopped snuggling with her mother at one year old. While a teenager at Stevens High School,

» **Wagman, A6**

IS ART ALLEY SAFE?



Chris Huber, Journal staff

Stephanie and Lynnnzi Yellow Eagle walk through Art Alley Wednesday night to look at the new artwork.

Eyes again on Art Alley safety

Homicide case in Art Alley sparks debate over safety

Daniel Simmons-Ritchie
Journal staff

It's Wednesday at 7 p.m. and Art Alley in downtown Rapid City is dank and quiet. The sound of passing cars bounces off paint-splattered walls. A pair of girls, 18 and 19, gaze at a mural of two skeletons in business suits.

Nearby, beside a concrete stoop, a handful of plastic sunflowers marks the spot where Lamaure Afraid of Hawk, 44, was found unconscious eight days before and later pronounced dead from blunt-force injuries to the head.

As police investigate Art Alley's second homicide in four years, a fresh round of

questions was being asked this week about one of Rapid City's most unique, and controversial, pieces of public art.

Is Art Alley safe?

Jeanne Simon, the owner of Again Books and Bazaar, an alley-side business, isn't so sure.

"I'm kind of torn," she said. "I have kind of been seeing an unsavory element back there in the last year or so."

A growing problem?

Some safety measures are already in place in Art Alley. Black Hills Power lights it for free. Destination Rapid City says its security

» **Art Alley, A4**

Police calls to Art Alley this year

- Intoxication — 12
- Assault — 4
- Theft — 3
- Juvenile problem — 2
- Fight — 1
- Panhandling — 1
- Stabbing — 1

SOURCE: Rapid City Police Department

NOTE: Call-outs are logged by the dispatcher based on initial information provided by the caller. It may or may not be an accurate reflection of what actually occurred. Eg. a caller may say there's been an assault but a police officer may arrive on scene and discover it was an intoxicated individual who fell down.

Details on Uranium mine still unclear

Hearings show the complexities of the mining proposal

Joe O'Sullivan
Journal staff

After two weeks of public testimony, one thing has become clear about the proposed uranium mine that would operate near Edgemont: many things about the project remain unclear.

The process paperwork and permit applications surrounding the uranium mine proposed for an area near Edgemont are so complicated that no one other than mining company Powertech can decipher all the legal language. And even company officials have wavered at times in their explanation of what they will do, how much water they will use, how many jobs will be created, and what risks exist.

Attorney Michael Hickey, an opponent of the project, is one of those tasked with trying to comprehend the tens of thousands of pages of technical data the company has produced.

And that's a big problem, as Hickey told the Water Management Board during hearings held in Rapid City last week.

"It consists of nearly 80,000 pages of documents, very complex documents," said Hickey, who represents the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary. "Documents that are very technical and frankly certainly beyond my comprehension and ability to understand completely."

As a pair of governor-appointed

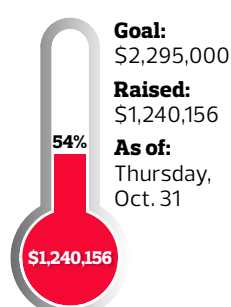
» **Powertech, A5**

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» From A1

Powertech

state permit boards decide whether to allow uranium mining to South Dakota, the stakes couldn't be higher, and yet the issue couldn't be murkier.

As he testified at last week's hearings, John Mays, vice president of engineering for Powertech, didn't ease the concerns of opponents who worry over potential groundwater contamination.

Under questioning, Mays refused to commit Powertech to cleaning water in the mining area to its pre-mining condition. Mays said it was a primary goal, but not a requirement.

Nor would Mays specify what other heavy metals might be extracted along with uranium and then injected back into the aquifers.

Mays testified that only uranium and vanadium — another metal the company hopes to mine — are certain to circulate in and out of the ground. As for arsenic, selenium, molybdenum, and other potentially harmful metals, Mays wouldn't say.

"What you're telling this board is that you don't really know what's in that ore yet?" Bruce Ellison asked Mays. Ellison is an attorney for Clean Water Alliance, a group of mining opponents. "You haven't done enough testing?"

Mays said those metals could turn up, but "we don't know exactly."

In at least one other in situ mine site, water after clean-up showed increased concentrations of some of those substances, according to evidence introduced by Ellison.

Dozens of leaks and violations at other in situ mines around the country show that contamination is possible. Some recent instances are only a few hours drive from Dewey-Burdock.

In 2010, Wyoming state officials found problems with contaminants moving through groundwater at the Christensen Ranch site near Gillette. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality sent a letter to the mine's owner stating that uranium levels were "over 70 times" what was allowed in groundwater near the mine's permit boundary.

In 2011, the state of Wyoming issued a violation after up to 10,000 gallons of sodium chloride brine spilled into a dry stream at the Irigaray site of the Willow Creek mine. The mine's owner, Uranium One, took two weeks to notify the state. It should have done so in 24 hours.

Powertech attorney Max Main has objected to examples of other in situ mine violations being brought up in the hearing.

Other inconsistencies

The NRC will likely grant Powertech its full operating license in December, according to Mays. That, however, will come before a hearing disputing the commission's environmental impact statement is scheduled, according to Mays' testimony.

Despite the fact that the Atomic Energy Licensing Board has upheld those disputes, the company will get its license, according to Mays.

It's just another of the perceived inconsistencies that rattle opponents.

Opponents spent part of the hearing noting the different numbers Powertech has given. For example, the company is requesting state permission to use up to 8,500 gallons per minute of water. But in describing the mining operation to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the company said it needed only 4,000 gallons per minute.

So, too, the amount of uranium mined and the numbers of jobs Dewey-Burdock would create have changed. Mining opponents argue that this means the company's application is incomplete and should

Uranium mine basics

The proposed Dewey-Burdock uranium mine would be about 15 miles northwest of Edgemont and operated by Powertech. It would use something called in situ mining, in which oxygenated water is injected into the Inyan Kara aquifer to absorb uranium.

The water would then be pumped back to the surface, where the uranium would be extracted and processed. The company proposes to put thousands of injection, extracting and monitoring wells in an ore body that it now projects will deliver 1 million pounds of uranium annually for eight years.

It's considered safer and cleaner than the open pit mines of South Dakota's past. But opponents fear contamination on some scale is inevitable.

"We've closed the door on possibility of using that water in the future... for clean industrial development, for expanded agricultural development, for massive development of retiree housing. ... Those doors are closed by this decision."

Jim Petersen, mining opponent

be rejected.

Powertech officials explained this as a routine changing of projections as the company tweaks its business plan.

Meanwhile, the state Division of Securities is seeking more information from Powertech about whether it has been selling stock in South Dakota without proper registration, according to news reports.

Michael Youngberg, director of the division, told the Sioux Falls Business Journal that if that were true, the company would need to register with the state and pay a late fee.

Oversight concerns

The issue of who and how the mining will be regulated remains somewhat of an open question. The North Dakota oil boom is a reminder that it's easy to be skeptical of the regulators responsible for overseeing mines.

In late September, a large

oil spill was discovered that North Dakota state officials kept secret for over a week. The state initially thought only 750 barrels had spilled, but the spill proved to be some 20,000 barrels spread over 7.3 acres. Since that spill, it has been revealed that North Dakota officials have kept nearly 300 other, smaller spills secret.

South Dakota's Department of Energy and Natural Resources has given little public indication of how and to what extent it would oversee Powertech's operation. Richard Clement, the president and chief executive officer for Powertech, told the Journal during the hearings that he'd like to have at least one state inspector on-site. But the DENR cannot "directly regulate well casing materials for injection, production and monitor wells," according to Powertech's application to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Mining opponents like

Jim Petersen fear that contamination could rob the Black Hills of what may be its most precious resource: water.

If the region's water supply is tainted, Petersen testified that it could hinder other development.

"We've closed the door on possibility of using that water in the future... for clean industrial development, for expanded agricultural development, for massive development of retiree housing," Petersen said. "Those doors are closed by this decision."

Later on, Mays testified the projected cost of cleaning up the entire mine site to be \$27 million. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which issues the company's operating license, has the authority to set the company's bond, according to previous testimony. Right now, it is unknown how much money the company will be required to post as bond.

Both state boards will make final decisions on the minerals and water permits in the coming months.

Contact Joe O'Sullivan at 394-8414 or joe.osullivan@rapidcityjournal.com. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Town loses three police chiefs in less than a year

Associated Press

WORTHING | The city of Worthing has lost its third police chief in less than a year.

The City Council voted Monday to fire Matthew Hess, a former Watertown Police Department officer.

Hess was hired at a salary of \$40,000 a year, with a six-month probationary period.

Mayor Eric Saugstad would not discuss the reason for the termination, saying only that the matter is a personnel issue.

Before Hess, Worthing had hired Brion Kimball, who resigned in May and is now the police chief in Centerville. Kimball left Worthing during his

probationary period after about a month on the job.

The city fired longtime chief Roger Knutson in December. Knutson, who was chief for 24 years, said at the time that personal conflicts with City Administrator Jeffery Tanner were at the heart of the problem.

The council has not moved toward hiring a new chief.

Saugstad said that residents in the town of 900 remain safe.

"At this point, I don't wish to comment on the state of the department. What I can tell you is that the city does continue to have police coverage," Saugstad said.

The town has three part-time police officers.

Man wanted for insurance fraud

Pennington County authorities have issued a

felony arrest warrant for Santee Maphiya Maza Baird, charging him with insurance fraud.

Baird, 35, stands about 6 feet, 2 inches tall and weighs 205 pounds. He has black hair and brown eyes.



Baird

He is — Journal staff

believed to be in or around Rapid City.

Anyone with information that could lead to Baird's arrest should call the Pennington County Sheriff's Office at 394-6117 or the Rapid City Police Department at 394-4131.

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