

## Death of a Child

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his attention: What killed the fish? In an article in the *Willits News*, dated August 20, were reports of unprecedented loss of fish life in Baechtel Creek (an extension of Muir Mill Creek).

Calls to the director of the North Coast Water Quality Board, the Mendocino Environmental Health Department, and the County Health Department revealed that rivers and streams in Mendocino County are not routinely tested for the presence of chemicals, only bacteria.

Remco Hydraulics, Inc., which has large timber holdings in the Willits area, was fined recently, and ordered to do environmental clean-up. In addition to diesel fuel and volatile organic compounds, Remco was ordered to clean up chromium — which is highly poisonous. But even with the death of a child, none of these agencies have tested for chromium in the stream, or any other chemicals for that matter. They don't even have the facilities to do such testing.

Did Forrest die because of poisons in the creek? The only chemical testing done by Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits and Lt. Broin of the Mendocino Coroners Office was for the presence of illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The police investigation of the site where the family was staying was limited to determining the house was not being used as a methamphetamine lab.

Forrest died of hypovolemia caused by internal bleeding, yet he had no signs or marks of any external injury. But what caused the bleeding? What role did the lumber companies' stands upstream in Muir Mill Creek have, if any, in his death? Although housed at the time of his death, what part did Forrest's past homelessness play in his death? If his family had had adequate housing during his short life, would he be alive today?

Perhaps we can comfort our discomfort by concluding that there was something wrong with Forrest. That he had a congenital weakness (a mild form of hemophilia). Or that, well, it is sad, but life is just sad sometimes. Or perhaps the death of Forrest is an urgent message for us all.

Families should be able to have homes to live in. All our

children should have their needs for food, shelter, and health care met. How can we tolerate allowing any of our children to be homeless in the midst of great wealth? How can we allow our forest streams to become so polluted, a few swallows of water can kill a small child?

Where is our bottom line? What next will we tolerate? I don't know the answers to these questions. What I do know is this: The death of a child is the worst.

**If you would like to help John Hernandez and Leslie Scales in their investigation of possible environmental poisoning in connection with the death of their son Forrest, please leave a message at (408) 425-3220 or write at: P.O. Box 7245, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.**

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