

Woody Guthrie, The Dying Doctor

Doctor Leo Hayes was our company doctor
From the big coal companies he got his pay
For thirty-nine years he tried to cure us
And now today on his deathbed lay.
He called his five boys and his three daughters
And at his bed we stood around
We heard him tell the history of the coal miners
And he said, "Don't let these people down."

You are all connected with the practice of medicine
You promise you'll keep true I know
You will do your best to help these people
I close my eyes for I must go.
His youngest girl was Doctor Betty
With her face so pretty and her smile so sweet
She walked the coal towns of Force and Byrndale
She saw the sewage waters flowing down the street.

She saw the children drink the cankered water
She saw the chickens fly up on the roof
She saw the waters overflow the sewers
And flood their gardens of victory.
She went to the big shots of the Shawmut Company
She did not beg and she did not plead
She stood flatfooted and pounded the table
Sewer pipes and bathrooms are what we need.

My dady told me to fight to cure sickness
But I can't cure sickness with sewage all around
These germs kill people quicker than I can cure them
We need a foundation under every house.
We need a bathroom for every family
Yes, you can set there and blink your eyes
Three hundred miners are out behind me
We will clean this town or know the reason why.

I quit my job as the family doctor
I nailed up my shingle and went on my own
I carried my pillbag and waded those waters
I set by a deathbed in many a home.
I saw you catch rainwater in rusty washtubs
I saw you come home dirty up out of your pits
Watched you ride with your coffin up to your graveyard
With not a nickel to pay your burying debt.

On July the fifteenth from the hills around
Three hundred miners walked down through town
The state inspector was testing the water
While he was working you stood around.
One miner asked him to have a drink free
The inspector looked out toward our pits
He set his hat back on his head and says,
"I wouldn't drink a drop of that on a bet."

I think of my daddy and brothers and sisters
When we stood around his dying bed
When I walk the streets of the company towns
I can hear every word my daddy said.
The Shawmut Company is caught in its own paws
The people not worth the money they cost
A hundred have died, three hundred not working
Thirty thousand tons of coal is lost.