

# Stories of pain spurred probe into sludge

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URBAN AFFAIRS REPORTER

It was the first phone call I made in what was to become an eight-month odyssey into the murky world of human waste disposal.

There was a pause after I identified myself.

"Oh, thank you," Wendy Deavitt said, relief and gratitude bringing her to the verge of tears as she realized someone was going to listen to her story.

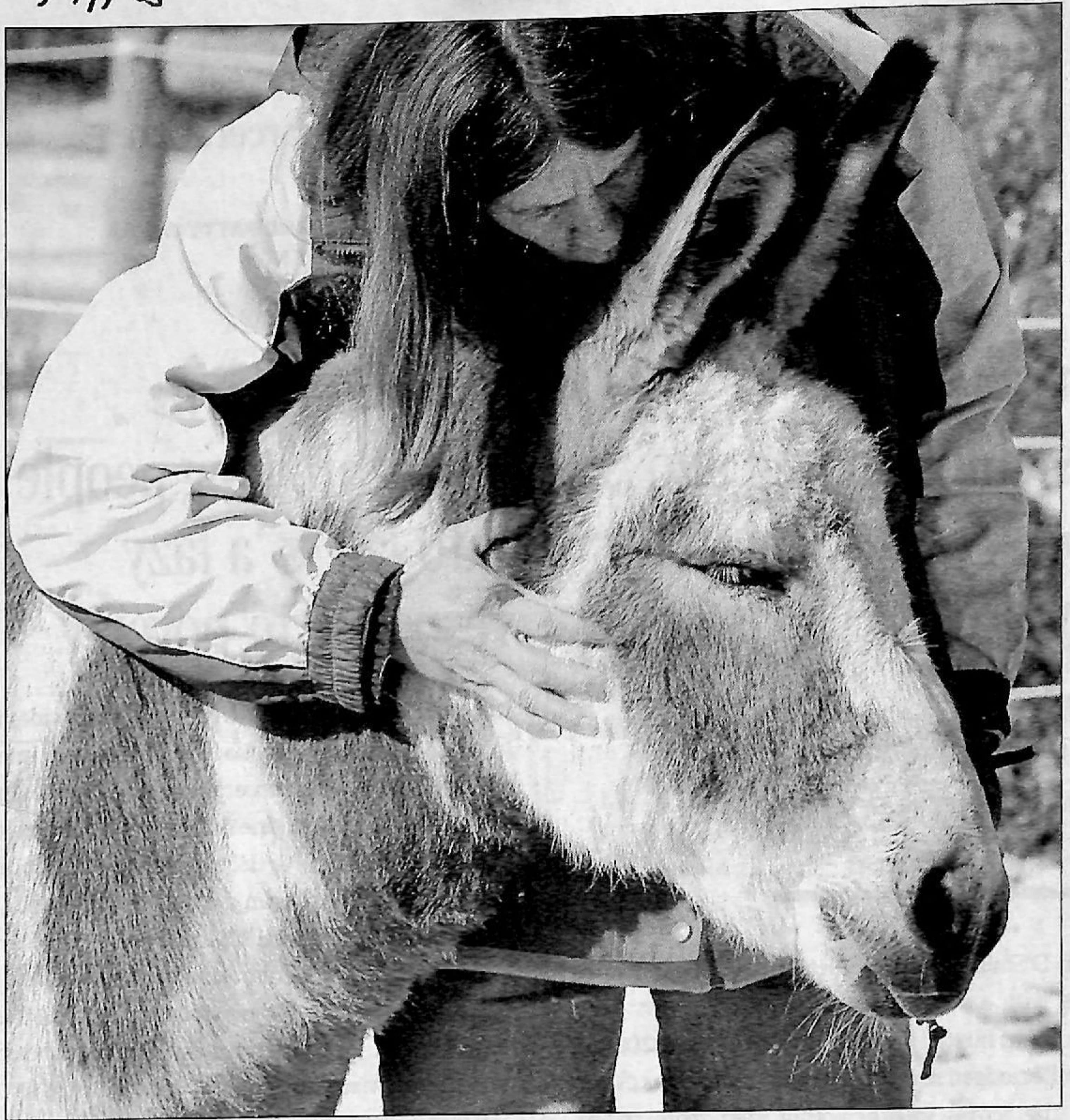
In that moment, I knew I had to do a lot more than just listen.

She was convinced she was slowly being poisoned. Her kidneys and bowels weren't functioning properly and she had elevated levels of heavy metals in her blood. Her husband and three other couples in Trent Hills were suffering from similar ailments. They said their ill health was caused by sewage sludge spread on fields near their homes.

All I knew then about sludge, or biosolids as it's also known, was a few tidbits offered by a friend who had alerted me to Deavitt's plight. It's the lumpy stuff, he said, that's left over after waste water is processed. It's common practice to use it as fertilizer.

A Google search yielded hundreds of similar cases, not just here but in other provinces and the United States. And thus began my journey across rural Ontario, through a sewage treatment plant and into the private lives of families and individuals who had been affected by sludge.

It was the personal stuff that propelled the project forward. Over coffee and banana bread in Deavitt's living room, her group — Warkworth Citizens Against Sewage Sludge — gathered one cold day to recount their attempts to get answers and action from the govern-



FRED THORNHILL/FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Wendy Deavitt hugs her donkey Samson on her farm near Warkworth, Ont.

ment. They had binders full of documentation, medical reports and pictures of sludge being sprayed into the air.

Dianne Cooke had meticulous notes with times, dates and details of phone conversations with officials. Linda Donaldson described a protest they staged, blocking the

path of a sludge-filled tanker truck. But after more than two years of fighting, they had nothing to show for their efforts except mounting frustration and declining health.

Deavitt's hobby farm was "worthless," her horses were sick and her cat had died from a urinary tract infection after wandering onto

sludge-treated soil. She was keeping its body in the freezer until she could raise the funds to have tissue samples tested at the University of Guelph.

The government continues to say there is no scientific evidence that biosolids make people sick. Deavitt says she has all the proof she needs.

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**BUMSTEAD, Leona Alice** - Leona Bumstead passed away on Sunday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in the Kingston General Hospital. Leona is the loving and loved wife of Lawrence (Lorne) William Bumstead. Leona and Lorne resided in their family home on Jakobi Road in Castleton. Leona is loved by, and will be missed by her children, including Ed Wilson (and wife Tammy), Mike Wilson (and wife Josette), Will Wilson (predeceased by wife Christa), Claude Bumstead (and wife Christine), Evelyn Bumstead and Lorne Bumstead (and wife Becky). Leona has great pride and love for her grandchildren, which include Jessica, Ashley, Travis, Anthony, James, Logan (predeceased), Tierney, Jake, Alexis, Shadoc, Krislyn, Phoenix and Adria. Leona loved, and is loved by many friends, and near all who came in contact with her. Special mention is noted for her childhood and lifelong friend, Elsie Blight, and her tow very close friends who assisted her in the later years in many ways, Beverley Simpson and Rhonda Purdy. In addition to the above named, Leona is mother to Jackie, Jim (predeceased), Marie, Diane and Laura. Leona will be honoured at the **Walas Funeral Home**, 70 Church Street in Warkworth where the family will receive friends, relatives and neighbours on Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, from 2 - 4 and 7 - 9 p.m. Service in the funeral home on Thursday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at 2 o'clock. Interment will be in Castleton Cemetery. As an expression of sympathy, donations to the Canadian Cancer Society, or the Lung Association, would be appreciated by the family.  
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