

# 1 The Struggle Begins

Low level nuclear waste is a misleading term. West Valley has low level waste that's so radioactive it has to be driven in shielded trucks. . . . They will tell you that in one hundred years all the radioactivity will be gone; that's not true.

—Carol Mongerson of West Valley Coalition

## DECEMBER 21, 1988, ALMOND, N.Y.—

NEARLY A YEAR BEFORE Sheriff Scholes's meeting with the state police from Albany, Betsy Myers was baking Christmas cookies and thinking about holiday parties, while her husband, Steve, sat at the kitchen table, reading the *New York Times*. Suddenly he jumped up, startling Betsy, and moved to the counter. "Look at this! There's a good chance that New York State's going to put a nuclear waste dump only a few miles from our home." A map of the state disclosed thirty-two townships that had been identified as potential sites. Five were in Allegany County. "Geographical, geological and population concerns," the article stated, "removed much of the state from consideration as potential sites," and "regulations excluded from consideration Long Island, New York City and the Adirondack Park."

"Low level nuclear waste," according to the article, included "things like contaminated clothing and equipment . . . from hospitals, industry and utilities." Steve was reading the article aloud to Betsy, but stopped and interjected, "Like hell. That's only the tip of the iceberg."

Steve was a muscular man with short cropped hair and such a closely clipped beard that it appeared to many as though he simply hadn't shaved for a week or two. He had been involved in enough environmental movements to doubt that any nuclear waste would be innocuous. After graduating from Pratt Art Institute in New York City where he specialized in photography, he worked on one of the first ecological exhibits in the United States, entitled



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“Air and Water Pollution,” at the Smithsonian Museum in 1967 and began an odyssey as a radical environmentalist. A year later he was on the staff of *New York Magazine* where he photographed stories that ranged from the Hell’s Angels to the artistic community in SoHo. One particularly memorable piece was on pollution of the Hudson River. In addition to his work in photojournalism, Steve began to establish himself as a commercial photographer.

He and Betsy became sweethearts when both were students at Pratt. After graduation, they became pioneers in SoHo at a time when New York City zoning codes made it illegal to live there. Nevertheless, the inexpensive rents of abandoned industrial buildings and the huge spaces for lofts attracted struggling artists, and the authorities mostly ignored them.

Since the birth of their son, Matthew, a couple of years earlier, the Myerses had talked about moving to a rural area to raise their family. They had hesitated, because Steve feared his opportunities for artistic and commercial

work would dwindle. Two muggings, one that sent Steve to the emergency room and the other that badly frightened Betsy, finally tipped the scales. They moved to Almond, a village on the eastern edge of Allegany County, not far from the Pennsylvania border.

Steve had earlier developed commercial relations with Dow Corning and Eastman Kodak, two companies situated in western New York within seventy miles of their new home. Betsy's family still lived in Almond, where her mother was highly respected as a local historian. Steve had been accompanying Betsy to the area since 1966. Having spent all of his youth in large American cities, he was fascinated by the county's rural life, which he began photographing.

Steve paced the kitchen and re-read the *New York Times* article out loud to Betsy, becoming more and more agitated. Looking again at the map showing the thirty-two targeted townships, he blurted, "I think it's going to be in Allegany County. The other places are either too close to New York City or too far from a major highway. They'll want to use the Southern Tier Expressway." He was referring to a four-lane highway (now designated Interstate 86) that bisects Allegany County, extending from Harriman near the Hudson to a corner of Pennsylvania where it intersects with Interstate 90. "Look at this map! Allegany County is the only targeted place in western New York. I know they'll try to put it here."

"You think so?" asked Betsy, a strikingly stylish woman in her forties.

"Sure. They'll try to find some rural community without much political clout. All the better if the place is near a major highway."

"What about the other places?" she asked, brushing her dark hair off her forehead with the back of her hand.

"There are a couple other possibilities, but Allegany County is just the sort of place that's most likely." Steve paused and added, "Remember when I traveled to that environmental conference in Bozeman, Montana?"

"Yeah, that's the conference you attended with Pete Emerson, wasn't it?"

Pete Emerson was then vice president of the Wilderness Society. He had been Betsy's classmate at Alfred-Almond Central School and had grown up on a nearby dairy farm that his parents owned and operated. His folks still supplemented their farm income by tapping sugar maple trees, boiling down the sap until it was forty times more concentrated. Impressed by Steve's work in environmental photography, Pete invited him to a conference in Bozeman, where he met other environmentalists and shared a cabin with Wisconsin's environmentalist senator, Gaylord Nelson.

"I heard enough about the shenanigans of the nuclear industry to know that Orazio's statement about no environmental hazard is just bullshit." Steve had again turned to the *New York Times* article, which quoted from Angelo Orazio, the head of the siting commission.

“Listen to this,” he continued. “Orazio says that ‘some localities might welcome the plant . . . because of potential jobs.’ It’s the same old pattern. That’s the lure to fool people into accepting all kinds of hazardous shit!”

“We’ve got to alert people,” Betsy said, little realizing how much their lives would be changed by this obvious statement.

Steve’s single-mindedness and Betsy’s dedication were largely responsible for the speed with which many groups in the southern and central parts of the county coalesced into a county-wide organization. In the final ten days of 1988, they telephoned everyone they knew and confronted people they saw in grocery stores and gas stations. Their words of alarm, like the seeds in one of Jesus’ parables, were sown on both fertile and rocky ground, some quickly taking root, some withering on parched soil, some waiting for a good rain to get started. While people generally felt that a nuclear dump would threaten their lives, a few dismissed Steve as overzealous. In any case, most thought that battling the state would be futile. The Myerses realized they had a fight on their hands to overcome people’s apathy.

Steve’s language was peppered with images of callous officials in the nuclear industry, supported by corrupt politicians, who had knowingly destroyed communities across the United States for profit. Embedded in his conversations were snapshots of the ruination of idyllic life in the rural county. Most of all, a moral outrage sizzled beneath the surface of his words, a fury that occasionally left him speechless as he grappled to find appropriate language to express his horror about having a nuclear wasteland in his back yard.



Sandy Berry lived just a couple of blocks down the street from the Myerses and had been a good friend for several years. Steve called her shortly after he learned that the siting commission had targeted Allegany County. Her nine-year-old son, Garrett, was best friends with the Myerses’ youngest child, Shep, also nine. Steve had recently taken photographs of her sculptural pieces for a New York Fine Arts Award application.

Sandy practically became part of the Myers family for the next few weeks and, in the beginning stages of the fight, would become Steve and Betsy’s closest ally. A slight, animated young woman with an energy that matched her flaming red hair, Sandy’s spirit was playful and relaxed, while Steve’s energy was pointed and intense. When Steve’s outrage caused him to lose perspective, Sandy would introduce lightheartedness into their discussions.

Over the next few weeks Sandy, a single parent, put her third-grade son on the school bus in the morning and walked down to the Myerses’ house

for coffee. The three of them would go to the post office to get the latest materials from protesters who were fighting a nuclear dump in Michigan, or from the West Valley Coalition, or, eventually, from their lawyer. As they walked to the post office, Sandy would spin dreams, casting Steve as a congressman and visualizing an environmental utopia. Other times she would speak of nightmares—people dying of cancer because of chemicals and radionuclides that greedy people were allowing into the environment. A few times her imagination even took her into a dark, mythological world where grotesque mutations occurred to her grandchildren because of her son's exposure to radiation.

In the week after Christmas, Betsy and Steve scheduled a meeting in Almond for the afternoon of January first. They never considered that people might want to watch football games that day. With no interest in sports and no television set, they were literally not plugged in to popular American culture. Remarkably, thirty people crowded into a room at the Historical Society's Hagadorn House for the hastily called meeting. Discussing the threat to the environment, Steve explained why Allegany County was the likely target for a nuclear dump.

Dressed in slacks and a blue shirt, he stood at the front of the room. "I know they're going to put it here," he said. "Our only chance is to get people together for massive protests. That'll be hard, because most people think you can't beat the state. It'll be tough, but if we can get enough people to stand up and confront the authorities, we can beat them. We've got to motivate the people in the county to resist. We've got to cover the county with posters opposing the dump."

Others at the meeting were cautious about getting too involved. Some privately wondered whether Steve was overly alarmist, even as they dutifully elected him as president of the tiny group. When no one else volunteered, Betsy, Sandy, and Betsy's brother also became officers. Steve was too focused on the impending confrontation to consider people's reluctance to take a more active role; he was gearing up for the battle of his life.

Not the first to organize—a group had formed in the northern part of the county two days earlier—the Almond group was particularly effective in coordinating the early activities in much of the county. Not only did Steve call people in other areas, encouraging them to become involved, he supplied them with information. Sandy Berry, with no scientific training, was their unlikely emissary, traveling in her 1958 Chevy to many early meetings where she passed out information and distributed pamphlets written by antinuclear activists in other parts of the country. The archetypal presence of wild energy in the guise of a woman with red hair moved many people to get involved.



JANUARY 5, 1989—

After putting her son on the school bus, Sandy Berry rushed down the street to the Myers house. She could hardly wait to tell them that nearly one hundred people had packed themselves into the tiny West Almond grange hall.

“Those farmers are really angry,” she said, bursting into the Myerses’ kitchen. “They’re ready to fight. They wanted to know what to do. I told them we’ve got to blanket the county with our ‘Bump the Dump’ posters, and we need to raise money to pay for them. I also told them it was important to come protest when the siting commission comes here.”

“Yeah, that’s the first step to changing the apathy,” Betsy said. “We’ve got to say loud and clear that we won’t take it. We’ve got to keep the nukers from getting any foothold here at all.”

Sandy shed her coat, helped herself to coffee and a doughnut, and sat down at the kitchen table. “Rich Kelley’s got lots of farmers fired up in West Almond. His family’s had a dairy farm there forever. He knows everyone and they seem to respect him.”

“What’s he like?” Steve asked.

“He’s about my age, early thirties, strong stalky guy with a full, bushy beard. He’s got lots of energy and his head’s on straight. He graduated from Alfred University about fifteen years ago as a math major, but decided he’d rather farm his family’s land than teach math and science in high school.”

“We’ve got to invite him to attend our strategy sessions,” Steve noted, helping himself to another cup of coffee.

“When I talked with him,” Sandy said, “he wondered whether we were going to the political meeting tomorrow.”

“What meeting?” Steve asked.

“He said that Hasper and Ostrower set up a meeting with county legislators and other big shots in the county.” Sandy was referring to New York assemblyman John Hasper and his county liaison, Gary Ostrower, a professor of American history at Alfred University. “Rich Kelley’s suspicious of politicians. He thinks Hasper’s trying to take control and speak for the whole county.”

“We can’t let that happen.” Steve sputtered, stood up, and paced across the kitchen. “The nuclear establishment will wrap the politicians in this county right around their little finger. They’ve probably already paid Hasper off.”

“The state will promise to lower taxes and Hasper and the county legislators will sell out for blood money—thirty pieces of silver.” As he talked,

Steve's eyes bulged and his face became red. "Don't they understand that this is war?"

"Calm down, Steve," Sandy interjected, putting her hand on his shoulder. "If you don't, your eyes are going to pop right out of your head and you'll have a heart attack."

Steve seemingly ignored her, but settled down. "We're going to attend this meeting! When and where is it?"

"I don't know," Sandy answered. "Rich didn't say. So many people were coming up to us after the meeting that we didn't talk long."

"Why don't we call Gary Ostrower and ask him?" suggested Betsy.

"Good idea," Steve responded. "Ostrower better know that he and Hasper won't get away with making deals behind our backs. Why don't you call him, Betsy?"

The phone rang in Ostrower's office at Alfred University. He answered the phone in his usual staccato style. "Ostrower."

"Hello, Gary. This is Betsy Myers. When and where is tomorrow's political meeting about the dump?"

"Two o'clock in the Legislative Chambers at the County Courthouse." Although Gary had done much of the organizing for the meeting by planning the agenda and suggesting people who should attend, Hasper had invited most of them. They had decided that presidents of the colleges, county legislators, prominent businesspeople, and scientists would more likely attend if the invitation came directly from the assemblyman. When he answered the phone, Gary had not recognized Betsy Myers's name and assumed that Hasper had invited her.

"You know that Steve and I have been organizing people to fight the nuke dump, and we'd like to come to your meeting," Betsy continued.

Seldom at a loss for words, Gary was momentarily startled into silence. They had wanted to keep the meeting small. Hasper and he had talked about getting the political and economic leaders of the county unified against the dump. Gary worried that hotheads spouting radical rhetoric would polarize the conservative, Republican county. Now he had visions of the strategy-planning session being invaded by large numbers of angry folks making unreasonable demands and antagonizing county leaders. He wanted to avoid this at all costs and blurted out the first thing that came to his mind. "You're welcome to come, but Steve is not."

Betsy was speechless. She couldn't think of anything to say, took a deep breath, and hung up the phone.

"What did he say?" Steve asked.

“He said I can come, but you can’t.”

“Bullshit, I can’t!”



## JANUARY 6, 1989—

Steve accompanied Betsy into the legislative chambers a few minutes before two o’clock.

John Hasper, a large man with graying hair, conveyed calmness and determination. Standing in front of the room, he set the tone. “You all know where I stand about siting a nuclear dump in the county. It would set back the progress we’re making in attracting new industries. Frankly, I’m fed up to here with all the proposals to make us the dumping ground for other people’s problems, whether it’s ash dumps, nuclear waste, or garbage from New York City.”

Politics was in Hasper’s blood. He was born in Albany on election day, November 4, 1935. His father was a lawyer who worked for the state legislature’s bill drafting commission for thirty-nine years, chairing it for the last sixteen. His mother was a legal secretary who worked for the commission. But rural life was also in his blood. He had attended school in Belfast, the geographical center of Allegany County, staying with his grandmother when the legislature was in session. He roamed the woods after school and became an avid hunter and fisherman.

As a state legislator, Hasper had fought hard to strengthen the economic life of the county that he deeply loved. A champion of the Southern Tier Expressway, he hoped that the major highway would attract new industries, particularly those compatible with the three colleges in the area: Alfred University, Houghton College, and Alfred State College. He was discouraged when the road only seemed to bring new proposals for building various kinds of garbage dumps.

“We’ve got to be smart about fighting this thing,” he continued, punctuating his words with his hand. “We can’t just start shooting off our mouths without knowing what we’re talking about. The siting commission’s coming here at the end of the month. We need to get as many people to come to that meeting as possible. We also need to organize speakers ahead of time so we roughly know who’s going to talk about what.”

Betsy Myers spoke up from the rear of the room. “Who’ll decide who gets to speak?”

“We need to coordinate that,” the assemblyman responded, “so that everyone doesn’t say the same thing. I suggest we let the county administrator set it up. Why don’t the leaders of the citizens’ groups call his office?” Privately



Hasper shared Ostrower's concern that the people forming the protest movement were hotheads, who would alienate others. A conservative legislator, John saw many environmental protesters as "whackos," tree huggers who failed to consider economic issues along with their love for the land. He knew radicals would alienate people in the conservative county, and he vowed to keep them from controlling the county's fight against the dump.

Steve Myers, however, didn't hear the passion in Hasper's voice. He assumed that most politicians would say one thing, then turn around and do another. He imagined that the Republican legislator had major contributors who were part of the nuclear establishment. Steve leaned forward in his chair and stared intently at the legislator. He would keep the politicians from selling out the county. But he knew he'd have to act quickly to unify the various citizens' groups that were forming throughout the county.

This was as good a time as any, he thought, to establish his credentials. He rose and announced, "The citizens' groups will have an important meeting at the Almond fire hall next Friday at eight o'clock. Carol Mongerson of the West Valley Coalition will be there to explain the danger of nuclear dumps. We'll also be coordinating a strategy to confront the siting commission when they come on January 26."

Hasper didn't know whether Steve was one of those "whacko environmentalists," but he'd have to find out. For now, the assemblyman ignored the outburst and continued, "One more thing. I've asked Gary Ostrower to set up a technical committee to respond to the commission's report identifying Allegheny County as a potential site. I used a similar technique in Livingston County when the Corps of Engineers wanted to dam the Genesee River. No one wanted to see the beautiful canyons in Letchworth State Park destroyed. We showed scientifically why it wouldn't be a good idea and were able to stop it."

Gary Ostrower, a short, thin man in his late forties, loved being at the center of political decision making. A liberal Republican, he seemed an unlikely spokesperson for the conservative legislator. Hasper was, however, impressed by Gary's energy and pragmatism; Gary deeply respected Hasper's integrity, even though he disagreed with him on many social issues such as abortion. "As most of you know," Gary said, "I work part time as John's liaison with the county. At his behest, I've started to put together a group of scientists and other experts to study the siting commission's report on the candidate areas. We're going to tear it apart and examine each piece of evidence."

Ostrower feared, however, that Hasper's earlier comments about his political commitment against the dump might scare off scientists committed to objective investigation. "I want to emphasize that this isn't going to be a hatchet job. We're going to examine all of the evidence and let the chips fall where they may. Our report will be credible only if we're scientifically objective."

What Ostrower did not say publicly was that he was putting an ethicist, a sociologist, and an economist on the technical committee to make sure that the report would contain serious objections to a nuclear dump, even if the geologists, biologists, and physicists concluded that the county was a suitable place for nuclear waste. Suspecting that the siting commission hadn't done its homework, however, Ostrower thought the scientists would find serious flaws in the report.

Steve Myers bristled when Ostrower talked about producing an objective report. Didn't he understand that this was war? Didn't the politicians understand that the road to hell was paved with scientific objectivity? "That's just what the siting commission wants," he muttered to himself, "people debating the fine points of science while the state is building a dump here."

Gary noticed Steve leaning forward in his seat, glaring at him. Irritated that Steve had crashed the meeting, Gary reiterated, "I've assured the scientists who are on the technical committee that they are expected to approach the data with complete objectivity. That's the only way that our report will have any credibility." Gary knew he was taking a risk, but felt that the odds were in the county's favor.

During the meeting a couple of geological experts offered a few observations about gas wells in the area and the possibility that the Clarendon-Linden fault extended into the county. Several citizens suggested other ways to thwart the siting commission. Rich Kelley proposed that the county legislature enact a law, requiring the state to do a baseline study of residents' health before they could build a nuclear dump. That would burden the state financially, he explained, and perhaps discourage them from choosing Allegany County. Hasper was enthusiastic. "I like it. That's the kind of idea we're looking for. We should have the county attorney look into this."

Near the end of the meeting Hasper introduced John Hunter, president of Alfred State College. Steve Myers became especially agitated when Hunter said, "We see a real educational opportunity. . . . Alfred State College does not take a political stance. . . . You really don't need the support of institutions. You don't need to be afraid." He concluded, "We at Alfred State College are here to help with questions in the appropriate fields of technology and appropriate areas of education." Leaning over to Betsy, Steve muttered, "Who the hell does he think he is to tell us not to be afraid?"

Hunter's tepid statement disappointed Ostrower. He had hoped that the educational institutions would oppose the dump out of self-interest, if for no other reason.

One of the legislators asked about Alfred University's position. John Hasper read a letter from president Edward Coll, who, like Hunter, empha-

sized that the university could not take an institutional stance. Instead, Coll offered technical “expertise to serve the needs of interested parties in this debate. We will be pleased to provide professional guidance on both the merits and the hazards of the Allegany County sites and will make this expertise available to you and others. Alfred University is one of the national leaders in research on ways to create safe and secure methods of disposing of radioactive wastes and several of our faculty members are conducting research on this problem.”

Hasper turned to provost Rick Ott, who represented the university at this meeting, and thanked him for the offer of help. “I understand that it wouldn’t be appropriate for the university to take an institutional position. I’m really interested in getting the individual expertise from your faculty.”

Betsy Myers seethed on the edge of her chair and barely refrained from shouting, “We’re working hard to keep this dump out of the county and you’re sitting up there pretending to be experts on safe ways to store nuclear waste.” She grumbled to Steve, “They’re so pompous and arrogant, pretending to be superior to us. We’ve been collecting information and studying the issues, yet they think they know everything. It galls me that Hasper’s thanking them for coming to a meeting!”

Steve was equally incensed. The siting commission, he knew, would use the institutions’ neutrality to crack open the county. They would hold seminars on the best way to build a nuclear dump and probably give the School of Engineering large amounts of money to design it. He found Coll’s emphasis on the university’s nuclear expertise chilling and saw how easily they might become complicit in siting a nuclear dump, while maintaining a guise of scientific objectivity. Both he and Betsy were now convinced that the colleges and politicians would sell out the county.

After the meeting Steve Myers and the activists met in one corner and Gary Ostrower and the scientists met in another. To Steve Myers, Gary’s technical committee was another form of garbage. He and the other activists vowed not to let politicians, scientists, and college administrators sell out the people. Steve said, “I don’t know how we’re going to stop it, but we have to keep the colleges in this county from becoming part of the siting process!”

Ostrower told the scientists that he would set up a meeting in about a week. Several others volunteered to be on Hasper’s committee. Fearing that the committee might become unwieldy, he mostly took names and told people he would get back to them. One of the most persistent, however, was Irma Howard, a well-dressed, prim woman in her forties. “I’d like to be on your task force.”

“What do you do?”

"I'm a biochemist at Houghton College," she answered.

"We already have a biologist on the technical committee and I don't want to have so many people that we can't operate efficiently," Gary responded.

"This is different. This is chemistry looking at biology and you *need* a biochemist." Irma surprised herself with her own insistence. With a very busy schedule, she had even been reluctant to come to today's meeting.

Like many others in the county, she hadn't initially thought that a "low level" nuclear dump was very serious. She had worked with radioactive materials in the past and assumed that they were relatively harmless if handled sensibly. Her husband, who taught history at Houghton College, however, smelled a rat and urged her to investigate. The Howards subscribed to Houghton College's ideal of Christian service in the world. They believed education should prepare people to become active in their communities. When Irma started studying the technical material about "low level" nuclear waste, she was astonished to learn that it contained extremely dangerous irradiated metals from nuclear power plants along with relatively harmless medical and research-oriented materials. Impelled by a strong moral sense, she decided to use her education and scientific skills to ferret out the truth.

"All right," Gary responded. "I appreciate your willingness to be on the committee. I'll let you know when and where we'll have our first meeting."



## JANUARY 7, 1989 —

The day after the meeting in the county courthouse, Ostrower called Betsy Myers on the phone. "Hello, Betsy. Yesterday Steve said you're planning a public meeting next Friday at the Almond Fire Hall. John Hasper would like to speak."

"What does he want to say?"

"I don't know for sure, but he wants to talk about political strategies for fighting the dump."

"We weren't going to have lots of speakers. We've invited the West Valley Coalition to tell us about their experience with nuclear waste. We want to allow plenty of time for questions."

"John doesn't want to talk long. He just wants to say a few words to let people know that he'll use all his political muscle to fight the dump."

Betsy suppressed her inclination to tell Gary what she thought of the politicians and college administrators at yesterday's meeting in the county courthouse. "We're getting together tomorrow to plan the meeting. We'll let you know."

“Would it be okay if I come?” Gary inquired. “We can talk about coordinating our activities.”

“No, I think it’s best for us to meet by ourselves. But I’ll let you know what we decide.” She said goodbye and hung up the phone.



## JANUARY 8, 1989 —

Emerging leaders in the eastern and southern parts of the county met in the Myerses’ kitchen on Sunday to plan Friday’s public meeting in the Fire Hall. Driving to the meeting, Rich Kelley told his brother-in-law, “I hope this is important. I can’t believe they’d call a meeting during the football playoffs! Let’s duck out early. I at least want to see the second half of the Bills’ game.”

As people were gathering in the Myerses’ kitchen, a thin, wiry man in his late twenties, wearing a leather medicine pouch around his neck and sporting a long pony tail and scraggly beard, showed up at the door. He handed Betsy a bag of doughnuts and introduced himself. “Hi. How’re you doing? I’m Jim Lucey and I’ve been reading about the nuke dump in the papers and saw that you’re organizing against it.”

Startled, Betsy invited him in, got out a plate for the doughnuts, and put them on the kitchen table. As people helped themselves, Steve asked Lucey, “Where’re you from?”

“My family and I bought an old farmhouse next to state forested land near Belmont. We’re going to build a house there. I’ve been doing some logging and construction work.”

After a few pleasantries, Steve suggested, “Why don’t you give me your phone number and I’ll let you know what we decide. We’re just starting to talk about it now.”

“I’d like to stay,” Jim said.

“But we don’t know who you are,” countered Steve, who was concerned that the fledgling movement convey an aura of respectability. “This is a private meeting for people who’ve organized groups in the area. We’ll have to ask you to leave.”

Jim was amused at this role reversal. He was used to being in protest movements where people looking like him were suspicious of “straight,” middle-class folks. He noted that most of these people weren’t even wearing jeans. “I fought against the nuclear power plant at Seabrook with the Clamshell Alliance. I was maced there, trying to cut through the fence. You’d better believe I’m committed to fighting the nuclear industry!”

Jim's words did not, however, allay Steve's fears about tarnishing the dump protesters with a "radical" image, especially in a rural county that votes overwhelmingly Republican. Another vague fear nagged at the back of Steve's mind. He had read about governmental infiltration of protest groups and how the nuclear industry had played hardball with people such as Karen Silkwood, who had blown the whistle on safety concerns at a nuclear power plant. Shortly thereafter she was somehow exposed to a lethal dose of radiation.

While Steve searched for words, Jim smiled and said, "Listen, you took my doughnuts. I'm staying!" Sandy Berry, recognizing an ex-hippie comrade, laughed and told Steve that he should let Jim stay. Betsy looked at Steve, shrugged her shoulders, and smiled.

Steve acquiesced, "Okay, I guess you're in."

Everyone expected Steve to continue, so he talked about what was on his mind—Hasper's meeting in the courthouse. "If those people start speaking for Allegany County, we've lost the fight. They won't do anything but talk."

"I'm still angry at their arrogance," interjected Betsy. "Those university know-it-alls and political big shots sat up front and were so condescending. They acted like they had all the answers. Imagine Gary Ostrower telling me that Steve couldn't come to the meeting! We've been doing more to organize people in this area than anyone." Betsy smiled, "Steve crashed the meeting anyway as my escort."

"Does Hasper really oppose the dump?" wondered Rich Kelley. "I know he's saying all the right things, but he could be in the pay of the nuclear industry."

"You might be right," Jim Lucey said. "Republicans have been pretty cozy with the nuclear industry."

Betsy scowled. "Can you believe that Ostrower called me yesterday and had the nerve to ask about coming to this meeting?"

"I can't believe Betsy was so polite to him on the phone," Steve added.

Betsy walked over to the counter with the empty doughnut plate. "We need to stay in contact with him so we know what they're doing. Gary asked if Hasper could speak at the Fire Hall. Do you think we should let him?"

When no one answered, Rich Kelley asked, "What do you think about the technical committee that Hasper's putting together?"

"They're fools," answered Steve. "That's exactly the game the siting commission wants us to play. They want to keep us talking about all the technical stuff. It's clear that's Alfred University's game too. Wasn't it cute how Coll offered the faculty's nuclear expertise? Neutrality, bullshit!"

No one said anything and Steve fumed, walking over to get a glass of water. "They'll try to get money for their so-called expertise and the siting

commission will be more than happy to use the university to shove the dump down our throats. And who's going to be on Hasper's technical committee? So-called objective scientists from the university!"

"You might be interested in knowing," said Glenn Zwegardt, a sculptor at Alfred University who was also a leader of the protest group in Alfred, "that Tom Peterson has circulated a petition among faculty, asking the administration to reverse its neutrality and oppose the dump. More than half of the faculty have already signed it. He's going to send it to each of the trustees and to the newspapers."

"Who's Tom Peterson?" Steve asked.

"He teaches comparative religions at the university and is interested in Native Americans. He's very committed to stopping the dump."

"Is there any chance he'll succeed?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"We should definitely have him read his letter or give a short statement at Friday's meeting," Steve said. "Nothing's more important right now than neutralizing the university."

"I know him," Glenn said. "I'll ask him to come."

"Should we let Hasper speak?" Betsy asked again.

"Why should we?" questioned Rich Kelley. "He's already had his meeting."

"That was my first reaction," Betsy said. "But maybe we need to smoke him out. We can't let him become part of the university's so-called neutrality game. We've got to keep him responsive to the people."

"That's right," interrupted Glenn. "Let's be smart like a fox. Let him speak. He can't say anything that would hurt us, and it would be good to get him on record again."

They talked for several hours more, putting together an agenda for the meeting. Jim Lucey volunteered to contact the printer about publicity fliers. Rich Kelley missed the football game, but the Bills lost anyway.

About 6 P.M. while the group was writing press releases and designing fliers, the phone rang and Betsy answered it. She turned to Sandy. "It's the kids. They're hungry and want to know what to eat." The two nine-year-olds had been hanging out at Sandy's house all afternoon.

"Tell them to open a can of soup," suggested Sandy.

Five minutes later the phone rang again. Betsy once more turned to Sandy. "The kids can only find a can of mushroom soup."

"That should be okay. Tell them to mix it with a can of milk and heat it up."

A few minutes later the phone rang again. One of the kids said, "We can't find any matches to light the burner."

# It's Time For Another Kind Of Experiment



If you don't like the idea of being a guinea pig for the untested and unknown mixed waste that the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority plans on dumping in the Southern Tier, we're with you. Although the employees of the proposed nuclear waste site will be wearing monitoring equipment, there will be no such protection for those of us who, for generations, have made our homes here. A policy of testing for their future, but not for ours, speaks for itself.

The nuclear power industry is unique in that it is the only business that can demand the government dispose of their hazardous waste. This industry, through OUR government, now threatens our entire region with the proposal of a radioactive waste site in Allegany County. So, even if you're not the type of person that usually gets involved with laboratory rats, perform a new kind of experiment by filling out the attached coupon and calling the NYSERDA number below. They need to hear where the Southern Tier stands on this issue.

Let them know we are not available for testing. **NO RADIATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION!**  
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Suddenly Betsy became alarmed. “Don’t do anything more. We’ll be right there and get you something to eat.” Hanging up the phone, she turned again to Sandy. “Whoa! Time out! The kids can’t find matches! What on earth are we doing? We’re so crazed, we’re not even paying any attention to the kids. This is unbelievable. We haven’t even taken time to eat anything but doughnuts. Let’s break this up and go get some pizza.”

The children of the activists would be eating a lot of canned soup and pizza during the next few weeks.



## JANUARY 13, 1989—

The meeting at the Almond Fire Hall drew a crowd of seven hundred people, mostly from the eastern part of the county. Out in the hallway people set up tables to hawk “Dumbuster” T-shirts and “Bump the Dump” bumper stickers. The Almond citizen’s group sold copies of *Forevermore*, a series of articles in the form of a Sunday magazine supplement from the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, exposing a history of unconscionable negligence in storing nuclear waste. A pronuclear group, The New York State Low-Level Waste Generators (NYSSLWG—pronounced “Nissle Wig”), came down from Rochester. Sandy Berry had mistakenly thought she was talking to an antinuclear lobby and invited them to the meeting. The activists, though chagrined about discussing their plans with a pronuclear lobby, nevertheless allowed the group to set up a table and pass out its literature.

The story told by speakers from the West Valley Coalition galvanized the crowd. The Coalition’s members had consistently kept the gross mismanagement of radioactive waste at West Valley in the public consciousness. Arguably, the tale of horror in neighboring Cattaraugus County had already predisposed the people of Allegany County to be suspicious of the rosy picture being painted by the siting commission.

The small village of West Valley lies about forty miles west of Allegany County’s border. Near the village is an abandoned plant for recovering uranium and plutonium in “spent” nuclear fuel for reuse in nuclear power plants. This reprocessing plant was owned by New York State but had been operated between 1966 and 1972 by a private corporation. After the operation proved to be an economic failure and ecological disaster, the private company walked away, leaving the state of New York with an environmental mess of monumental proportions.

The state had neither the expertise nor the money to handle the witches brew of nuclear waste that was concentrated in an aging 600,000 gallon tank,

nor did any technique exist for solidifying or encasing the waste. To make matters worse there were two burial grounds on the site for “low level” nuclear waste that presented serious environmental difficulties. Nuclear material had leaked and migrated from at least one of the clay-capped disposal trenches. In 1975 a trench had filled with water and overflowed, either due to a faulty clay cap, spring water, or both. An even more serious possibility existed that part of the burial grounds might wash into a series of creeks that eventually flow into Lake Erie.

In 1980, urged by a group of citizens and political leaders, the U.S. Congress agreed to take charge of the project in order to “demonstrate” the proper way to clean up nuclear contamination. They would fund 90 percent of the project, with the state of New York picking up the remaining 10 percent. By the end of 1998 they had spent more than one billion dollars and were nowhere near finishing the task. Some estimates were that it would take another eight billion dollars to clean up the site.

After the siting commission announced the potential dump sites, members of the West Valley Coalition began sharing their expertise with local people throughout Allegany County. Here at the Almond Fire Hall, Carol Mongerson talked about the false promises that were made by the state and nuclear authorities to gain the cooperation of local citizens. “They promised us ‘It won’t leak’ and, ‘It will make you rich.’ Well, we’re not rich and it did leak; there’s plutonium in a dam three miles away.”

She explained that “low level” waste included some very highly radioactive materials, some of which would be around for hundreds, and even thousands, of years. She emphasized the serious responsibilities entailed in accepting a nuclear waste dump in a community. The West Valley Coalition had concluded, she said, “that the only thing to do with it is to keep it retrievable. We’ll have to watch it for a long time—we’ll have to teach our children to watch it—but we really do not have a choice.”

Most importantly, she warned, the siting commission would try to get people squabbling among themselves. She predicted that people would start criticizing those who were more active as rash and those less active as timid. “If there are disagreements among you, ignore them and fight the nuclear dump in your own way, without criticizing those who follow other paths. You will not win if you start fighting among yourselves.”

Steve Myers was grateful that Mongerson had so clearly stated the dangers of nuclear waste. Maybe now people in the county would see that he was no unreasonable alarmist.

Assemblyman John Hasper picked up on Mongerson’s theme. “We have to stay cool, stay smart and stay committed so that the commission will not be able to separate our points of view. Benjamin Franklin said it best at the signing of

the Declaration of Independence and it holds true in this situation. ‘Gentlemen, if we don’t hang together, we most assuredly will hang separately.’“

Steve Myers had worried all week that apathy would keep many people from attending. Now, with seven hundred people tightly packed into the large room, he could relax. The meeting couldn’t be going better. Hasper had again made his position against the dump absolutely clear and Steve would publicly hold him accountable.

After Hasper spoke, Steve introduced me. “Tom Peterson teaches world religions at the Alfred University and is putting pressure on the administration there to take a stand against the nuclear dump.” As I came forward, Steve recalled a telephone conversation we’d had that morning.

“Glenn tells me that you don’t want to speak at Almond,” Steve had said.

“I really don’t have anything to say. I’m simply trying to get the university to change its position,” I replied.

Steve wondered whether he could be completely candid and explain why he wanted me to speak out. “Look, nothing’s more important right now than to neutralize the university. The siting commission will try to suck the university into cooperating with them.”

“You’re right. But what does my speaking in Almond have to do with all this?”

Steve Myers decided he’d have to be direct. “You’ll make the community aware of the university’s position and that may embarrass them.”

Had he gone too far? Steve wondered. Would the professor back away from such a direct confrontation? Steve held his breath. No one said anything for a couple seconds.

“Why not,” I said, “if you really think it’ll put pressure on them?”

That night at the Almond Fire Hall I concluded my statement, “The faculty are very upset that the university has not taken the lead in opposing the dump.” Steve rose to his feet and led a surprisingly loud applause. Clearly I had underestimated how strongly local people felt betrayed by the university’s neutrality.

During the week after the meeting in the Almond Fire Hall, Alfred University did in fact change its position. The provost and president decided to back the large majority of faculty who wanted the school to oppose the dump. They told newspaper reporters that their initial statement had only been “provisional.” Provost Ott also put forth an intellectual rationale: When there were already so many contaminated nuclear sites in New York State, it would be wrong to create more.

Houghton College issued its own statement opposing the dump a few days later.



Over the next three months, hundreds of meetings were held all over the county. Representatives of the many citizens' groups met in Angelica to form a county-wide organization, becoming the "Concerned Citizens of Allegany County" (CCAC). Steve Myers became president and Rich Kelley vice president. In addition to secretary and treasurer, all sorts of other offices such as action coordinator, outreach coordinator, and publicity coordinator were invented so that other county leaders had official positions in the newly formed organization. Each of the ten local groups would have autonomy, yet pool their resources and coordinate their activities.

Ostrower assembled the technical committee at provost Ott's house in Wellsville, the county's only industrial center with a population of slightly over five thousand people. Holding a meeting at the provost's home inflamed Steve Myers's suspicions that the university was still playing a double game, even though it had just gone on record opposing the dump. When word leaked back to Steve that Gary Ostrower had again emphasized that the scientists should approach the siting commission's report with complete and total objectivity, he stewed all the more.

Steve and Gary watched each other carefully over the next three months. Gary respected Steve's energy and organizational skills, but worried that his intemperate rhetoric would give political leaders in the county an excuse for doing nothing. Steve admired Gary's vitality, but fretted that the technical committee would inadvertently sell out the county. When Steve discovered that the next meeting would be at Gary's house, he crashed it. "After all," he later explained, "the technical committee was planning to speak for the whole county and the citizens had a right to know what was going on." He shared an even darker thought with Betsy. "They will know they're being watched." Although irritated at his presence, Gary bit his tongue and said nothing.

Gary's annoyance eventually gave way to grudging respect for Steve's political savvy and dogged determination. When honestly thinking about it, Gary even had to admit that he was, in fact, playing a dangerous game that could backfire if the siting commission opened up serious dialogue with scientists in the county.

Steve's mistrust was finally overcome on March 31, 1989, at a meeting in Fillmore, a rustic farming community in the northwestern corner of the county that had hardly changed since the nineteenth century. Gene Hennard, owner of the local feed mill and president of the northernmost CCAC chapter, had, against Steve's strong admonitions, invited members of the siting commission to Fillmore. The other county leaders had already developed a

unified strategy to have no more dealings with the commission, because they did not want to legitimize the process or signal any willingness to make a deal.

Never fully integrated into the county-wide movement, Hennard rejected this strategy, feeling it was more important to challenge the siting commission directly. No CCAC chapter wrote more letters to politicians or called the siting commission more often than did his group. Gene personally called them a couple of times each day to pester them with questions.

When Steve called Hennard to ask him what he was doing, Gene asserted his independence. "Let's face it," he said, "it's a crowd getter. If you have top performers, you're going to get a good crowd."

Sputtering, Myers tried to explain why no one should invite the siting commission into the county. It was dangerous, he said, to open up lines of communication with them. This argument made no more sense to Hennard than it did to Gary Ostrower whose technical committee was initiating a scientific dialogue with the commission. Gene felt the meeting would allow his people to blow off some steam and hassle the state even more. "Anyway, it's a done deal. Kathleen McMullen and Richard Wood have already agreed to come."

Wood was one of five members on the siting commission. He had worked for Niagara Mohawk at their nuclear power plant in Oswego for more than twelve years and now conducted research, funded by the nuclear industry, at Syracuse University. Wood feebly argued that since less than 10 percent of his salary came from his old employer, and since it was indirect, there was no conflict of interest to his serving on the commission. McMullen, a physicist, was the commission's liaison with the county.

Although Hennard's meeting was not publicized much outside the northern parts of the county, leaders in the protest movement all showed up anyway. Gary Ostrower decided to give the recently completed technical report to Wood during the meeting. When he got up to present the sixty-eight page report, many of the CCAC leaders were uneasy, and a few heckled him. One woman blurted out, "Who gave you and Hasper the right to speak for the county!?"

Ostrower glanced at her and walked confidently up on the stage. Gradually, as he read excerpts from the report's introduction, the tension eased. "For all the good intentions of the siting commission's plan . . . political considerations have already corrupted a technical solution to the waste problem." The report chastised the commission for its "bewildering refusal to select a disposal method in advance of selecting a site," and questioned "the meager funding that makes failure virtually inevitable."

The mood of the audience changed to exuberance when Gary read the technical committee's conclusions. "Some of what you will read suggests that New York State's plan for low level waste disposal needs to be rethought, some

suggests that the application of siting commission criteria . . . is so seriously flawed as to constitute a public injustice, and some suggests” that sites in Allegany County “simply do not meet the requirements . . . as established by your commission.” Myers breathed a huge sigh of relief. After the meeting he began mending fences with Gary by personally thanking him for his work.

A scathing scientific critique of the statistical methodology used by the siting commission in choosing the sites formed the heart of the report. What attracted the media, however, was Irma Howard’s imaginative, yet quirky, argument that no nuclear dump should be built where cluster flies existed. Cluster flies, unlike ordinary house flies, reproduce, not in sewage or garbage, but in earthworms. Rampant in Allegany County, these flies have an uncanny ability to violate human structures. No matter how clean a nuclear waste facility might be, these organisms would be potential vectors of its radioisotopes. Henceforth Dr. Howard, a nationally well-known biochemist, became affectionately known in the county as “the cluster fly lady.”

The county got no response for eleven months, long after the commission had narrowed down scores of potential areas in the ten counties to five specific sites, three of which were in Allegany County. Although the report’s scientific conclusions never got a hearing at the siting commission, it became a powerful political document that scientifically confirmed the suspicions of people in the county that they had been targeted for political rather than technical reasons. Allegany County was a rural, Republican, economically depressed enclave in a heavily urbanized, wealthy state that had a Democratic governor and Democratic Assembly. As newspaper reporters summarized the technical committee’s geological, biological, and statistical conclusions, the report served to foster people’s certainty that the proposed dump was one more instance of a quick fix for the nuclear industry—a twenty-four million dollar solution to a multibillion dollar problem.



## JANUARY 26, 1989—

The meeting that most significantly changed Allegany County’s perception of itself took place two months earlier in a high school gymnasium. Crowds had grown as the siting commission held public meetings in the targeted counties across the state, moving from east to west. Only a couple of days earlier, three thousand people had confronted the siting commission in Chenango County in central New York. Steve Myers worried that far fewer people would show up in Allegany County. He and other activists redoubled their activities to get people to attend.

In his regular newspaper column John Hasper urged “all those concerned to come out and . . . tell the governor’s commission how we feel.” Leaders in CCAC contacted newspapers and radio stations. Posters were plastered in every grocery store, restaurant, and bar in the county. Gary Ostrower said on the radio, “Don’t come to the meeting if you want the dump.” An editorial in the *Wellsville Daily Reporter* proclaimed, “Allegany County needs you in Belfast. Someday, people will say, ‘Remember the Belfast nuke meeting?’”

A cold rain was letting up at 6 P.M. as a steady stream of cars crawled toward the tiny village of Belfast. The slick pavement glistened under a mile-long glare of headlights. A January thaw had turned snowy fields into mud and dirt roads into squishy ruts of clay. With the thermometer hovering just above freezing, people feared roads would become sheets of ice before the night was over.

At six o’clock the sheriff posted deputies at the school door to prevent more people from entering. A northerly wind whipped water into people’s faces and up their sleeves. By the time the meeting started an hour later the rain had stopped, though a bone-numbing fog saturated the couple of thousand people gathered outside.

Not only was the gymnasium packed, but hallways and other rooms were jammed. Hundreds viewed the proceedings on TV monitors in the cafeteria. Loudspeakers blared rhetoric into the school yard. Images of a warmer world flickered on a TV monitor in a bus garage where shivering people huddled around a huge heater, vainly challenging the chilly dampness blowing in through open bay doors.

Ten simulated gravestones with the names of the sited counties lined the walkway to the building. A Buddhist nun from Japan, witnessing against the horrors of the nuclear age, spent the entire six hours slowly beating a drum, one beat every couple of seconds, while her companion made and passed out origami cranes, symbolizing peace. A Native American, probably a Seneca from a reservation seventy miles away, handed out leaflets, arguing that humans were caretakers of the earth, not owners of the land. Just as people were getting off a bus from Alfred University, an electrician who worked there stood up and told the students, “I’ll never forget you joining us tonight. You’re here in the county for only four years. You’ll be gone when they put the dump here. I want to thank you for your effort.”

The sheriff’s department estimated that five thousand people had come to Belfast that night, nearly 10 percent of the fifty-two thousand people who lived in the county. Nothing was said that night that would change any minds, but commitments were strengthened. For the first time in the history of Allegany County people from all walks of life showed up to protect their families and land—village dwellers and farmers, intellectuals and high school dropouts,

business people and professionals, workers and those on welfare, Republicans and Democrats. Even the Amish, who normally avoid political meetings, had come. John Hasper had invited them and saved them seats near the front. When the fourteen elders walked into the meeting moments before it began, they were met by thunderous applause. Now the county was complete. Throughout the evening they said nothing; mere presence was their statement.

Banners proclaiming “No Dump Here” and “Mourn the Death of Allegany County” mingled with the high school’s more permanent slogans, “Our J.V. Will Stomp You” and “Our Varsity Is Red Hot,” on the gym walls. A woman from one of the CCAC chapters hawked glow sticks for a dollar apiece, while another group peddled Dumpbuster sweatshirts for twenty and T-shirts for ten. People conversing with their neighbors raised their voices to compete with the sound echoing off concrete walls and wooden floors. Damp odors steamed off wet clothing and fidgety people chanted “No Dump” while waiting for the meeting to begin.

The siting commission presented their charts, graphs, and drawings of concrete bunkers, filled with nuclear waste, to the restless crowd. Slogans from hecklers punctuated the wooden, lackluster presentation. “We ain’t tak’n it!” “Go back to Albany!” “We’re not expendable!” After a particularly tedious monologue on options for storing nuclear waste, a woman shouted, “When do we vote?” The siting commission was able to say its piece only because Steve Myers, impeccably groomed and wearing a dark suit, flashed a hand-printed sign, reading “Quiet Please.”

For another five hours following the commission’s presentation, people expressed their profound revulsion against nuclear trash and their commitment to fighting the state. John Hasper, the second to speak, told the commissioners that they were facing “the initial efforts of the combined political, economic and social forces of the fifty-two thousand people in Allegany County.” Many people will explain, he declared, “why this dump is inappropriate and unacceptable.”

When people are faced with emotional issues, they seek to find metaphors to express their inchoate, but heartfelt rage. One woman had created a huge hand-held puppet called “The Mutant,” a cyclops with a vertical mouth, pock marks, and an open head with a brain pouring out of it. Painted in grotesque Day-Glo colors and wearing a gaudy turquoise skirt that hung down to the floor, the puppet bore a sign asking, “Will this be our destiny?” One man wore a grim reaper costume, while his wife chanted, “Death comes! Death comes!” during pauses in the speechifying.

The most successful metaphors of the evening were those that alluded to the American Revolution. After the commissioners’ presentation Steve Myers was the first to speak. For days he had agonized about what he should



say and asked others for suggestions. During one of their many exploratory conversations, Gary Ostrower had suggested that he look at the Declaration of Independence for inspiration. Now Steve spoke about the “tyranny of the majority,” who would create an “atomic wasteland the size of a small city.” Then, without introduction, he began reading the Declaration of Independence. Thunderous applause greeted the phrases, “Consent of the governed,” “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness,” and especially “the right of the people to alter or abolish” government itself. As he read from this ancient document, Steve swallowed his own emotions with difficulty, intensifying the power of the words.

The revolutionary theme reverberated throughout the evening in speech and symbol. A woman who wrote children’s stories wore a tricorn hat. A professor brought a revolutionary “Don’t Tread on Me” flag, with a coiled rattlesnake on it. A mother with three children asked, “Why shouldn’t people decide the future of nuclear power democratically?” Amo Houghton, the United States Congressman who represented the county, asked rhetorically, “If we don’t make it, and if we don’t use it, and if we don’t want it, why should we have it?”

Most of the people who approached the open microphones were not used to speaking in public, but felt impelled to express their defiance and to bear witness to the love of their families, their land, and their rural lifestyle. Volunteer firefighters questioned the emergency planning. If a disaster happened, one said, “we’re going to take one look at it and run like hell.” A construction worker wondered if the siting commission knew the half-life of cement. Gene Hennard, the owner of a feed mill in Fillmore and irascible leader of the northernmost chapter of CCAC, wondered why nuclear power plants were allowed to operate before developing a disposal system. After all, he argued, we can’t put toilets in our houses before we build the septic system.

A farmer, whose family had lived on the land for seven generations, explained that water flowed in all the cardinal directions from streams near his land, some of it ending up in Lake Ontario to the north, some of it in the Mississippi River, and the rest in Chesapeake Bay. As he traced the flow of water past trees and through meadows, people felt his intimacy with the land. Concluding, he told the commissioners that “God so much loved this country and he so much wanted us to share it with the rest of the eastern United States, that he did it by means of water.” A momentary silence greeted his final rhetorical question. “Do you people really want to defy God?” Then foot-stomping, whistling, and applause.

While people were testifying about their love for the land, the siting commission sat unmoved, uncaring, and bored, like atheists at a revival meeting. Testimony that seemed crucial to people in the county was to them irrelevant. An

elderly engineer, hands folded over a large gut, slept through much of the meeting. At times the commissioners tried to suggest that people were hysterical and unjustifiably frightened because they didn't know enough about radionuclides nor understand that the "storage facility" would be "state of the art." At such times anger nearly overwhelmed the general civility of the meeting.

When John Randall, head of the state agency authorized to run the dump, walked through the crowd on his way back from the bathroom, he was accosted by Stuart Campbell, "How can you look at yourself in the mirror?"

Randall turned and looked disdainfully at the man sporting a scraggly beard and wearing an old pair of jeans. "The best thing you could do is educate your children," he advised, unaware that Stuart was a professor of history at Alfred University with a son who was studying architecture at Rice University. Campbell would later become one of the founders of the nonviolent resistance movement in the county.

Near the end of the meeting someone finally asked the people on the raised platform to give biographical sketches of themselves. Only two of five commissioners were present. Richard Wood said that he had worked for the Niagara Mohawk nuclear plant for more than twelve years. He failed to mention, however, that he was still indirectly receiving money from his old employer to do research at Syracuse University. David Maillie talked about his long-time involvement in research in the Department of Nuclear Medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center. He failed to mention that the State Department of Health had cited his department for more than forty violations in the last two years, including illegal dumping of radioactive materials in the Genesee River, the loss of radioactive material, and contaminated desk drawers and trash cans. When a reporter for a Syracuse television station later asked him to justify the dumping, he said it was safe. "After a period of time materials in the Genesee River or a sewage system get diluted."

Gary Ostrower was one of the last to speak at the meeting. He told the commissioners that they should "have the guts to tell the governor . . . that your assignment is wrong." Tell the governor, he said, that the opposition is so strong and the plan so faulty that it should immediately be stopped in its tracks and sent back to the drawing board. Richard Wood could not resist the bait and told Ostrower that he felt the plan was a good one. "I think the job is an appropriate job and we're going to do it!"

At no time in the meeting were catcalls so loud. One tall young man stood up amidst all the cries of defiance and got everyone's attention. Shaking his fist at Wood, he shouted, "It's hotdogs like you that would make me stand right at the county line and say, 'Hey boys you ain't coming in here at all, ever!'" He would later be a monitor at a roadblock in West Almond, preventing the technical team from entering the site.

That night I also spoke, modeling my words on those of Winston Churchill. I told the commissioners, “We will fight this decision every step of the way. We will fight you in the halls of science. We will fight you in the law courts. We will fight you in the legislature. And if necessary we will fight you in the streets.” The crowd affirmed their resistance with thunderous applause. I made a decision then to involve myself in nonviolent resistance, and I would help found the Allegany County Nonviolent Action Group a few weeks later.