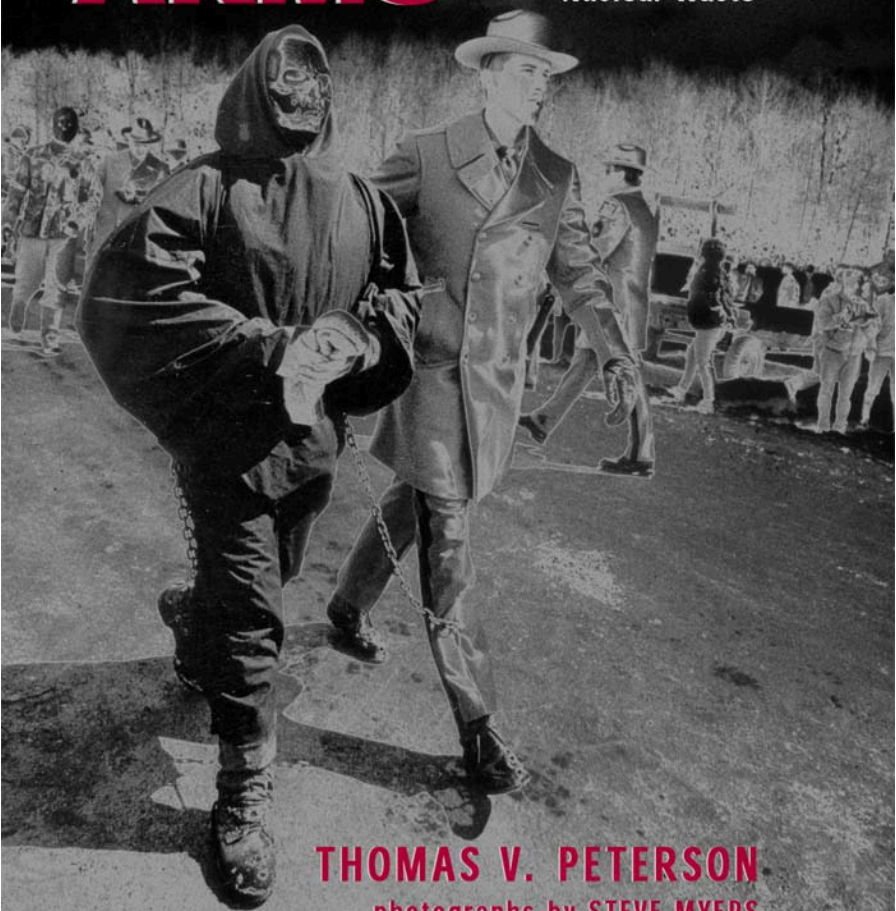


LINKED ARMS

A Rural
Community
Resists
Nuclear Waste



THOMAS V. PETERSON
photographs by STEVE MYERS

LINKED ARMS

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**A Rural Community
Resists Nuclear Waste**

THOMAS V. PETERSON

photographs by **STEVE MYERS**

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

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For Robert McAfee Brown, mentor and friend, whose example showed me that a scholar often has the ethical duty to become an activist,

and

for Carol Burdick, colleague, author, and friend whose belief in my writing abilities gave me confidence to write this nonfiction account in a novelistic style,

and

for the people of Allegany County whose many personal sacrifices preserved the environment and provided a unique model of nonviolent resistance for people everywhere.

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Preface

IN A RURAL COUNTY IN western New York, seventy miles south of Rochester, ordinary men and women not only kept a major nuclear dump out of their area, but also provided a model of resistance for communities across the United States. Merchants, teachers, homemakers, farmers, and blue collar workers ignored potential jail terms and large fines to challenge the nuclear industry and the government. The events in this story transformed common folks into extraordinary individuals, many of whom temporarily gave up their personal lives for the welfare of their community.

When New York State's siting commission said that Allegany County would be a good place for low level nuclear waste, men and women asked questions. Some answers troubled them; others horrified them.

"What is low level nuclear waste?"

The siting commission said it was not too dangerous—just things such as booties and gloves that workers wore inside nuclear power plants; or needles and test tubes that doctors used to treat cancer patients; or petri dishes and irradiated animals used by researchers in colleges and universities.

That was only part of the story, Marvin Resnikoff, a prominent nuclear physicist, told Stuart Campbell, a founder of the resistance movement in Allegany County. "Low level" waste included almost everything except for spent fuel rods, the casing around the reactor's core, and tailings from uranium mining. It did include, however, the irradiated metal clamps that hold the plutonium fuel rods in place in the core of nuclear reactors. Some of the material was so "hot" that it would kill anyone exposed to it for more than a few minutes; some had such long half-lives that it would remain dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years.

This question led to many others. "How can you choose the best site if you don't know how you're going to store the waste?" "Will you incinerate

waste at the facility?” “What is the half-life of the cement that will encase the nuclear waste?” “How dangerous is exposure to low doses of radiation?”

Questions exceeded answers. People began reading about the routine failures of storing nuclear waste throughout the United States. The technicians, they read, always wrapped themselves in the mantle of expertise, assuring concerned citizens that “professionals knew best.” Dismissing public concern as naive and ignorant, the experts had, in fact, made disastrous mistakes—then lied about them. Was it reasonable to think that these New York State commissioners had better solutions for handling nuclear waste than had their colleagues at Hanford, West Valley, Fernald, Oak Ridge, and Rocky Flats?

The past tragedies of nuclear storage and the callousness of the experts who had ignored people’s safety and health shocked the folks in Allegany County. Many wondered, however, whether a county that had no economic or political clout could defy the Empire State. Others joined together to form a movement that would contest the methodology of the siting commission, the statutes of New York, the short-term economic motivations of the nuclear industry, and the policies of the federal government.

The citizens hired a lawyer who challenged the congressional law and persuaded the governor to file a lawsuit against the federal government that eventually went all the way to the Supreme Court. They enlisted a preeminent nuclear physicist who convinced the governor that the classification of nuclear waste was bogus. They shattered the glib assurances of the siting commission. Most importantly, not content to question authority, they defied it. Five times over a twelve-month period they linked arms, stood in the bitter cold, and defeated the siting commission through civil disobedience.

Hundreds of people, who had never before broken the law, refused to let the siting commission with its multimillion dollar budget get onto the land. They refused to move when scores of state troopers ordered them to open up the roads. They defied a judge who threatened to fine them thousands of dollars and toss them into jail for six months.

These folks were optimists. They were also naive, believing they could persuade federal authorities to re-think their failed strategies for classifying and storing nuclear waste. But they were not lazy. These citizens sent out emissaries to other communities where authorities were trying to build nuclear dumps—in Nebraska, Connecticut, Michigan, Illinois, North Carolina, California—telling the story of Allegany County’s defiance. “Resist!” they said. “Don’t cooperate with those who want to put a nuclear waste dump in your community. Follow our example. Engage in civil disobedience! Join our lawsuit against the federal government!”

Allegany County’s story, grounded in optimism and forged in struggle, is the story of American democracy, rooted in the Declaration of Independence,

which provided a mythological framework for defiance of authority. Civil disobedience runs deep in American culture. Thoreau refused to pay taxes that would finance an unjust war; suffragettes voted illegally and went to jail to promote women's rights; northerners hid runaway slaves; civil rights protesters rode integrated buses into the deep South. Allegany County built upon these acts of rebellion. For this reason, if for no other, their story deserves to be told, for it is the story of the American character itself.

This story of resistance also raises profound questions that Americans need to address. What happens to democratic principles when corporations seeking short-term profits decide issues of life and death? How should we balance the interests of the many and the rights of the few? When is it morally right to defy the state through nonviolent resistance?

The Allegany County story also raises serious questions about how our nuclear past will affect our future. To what extent are we willing to pay the real costs of storing nuclear waste? Is there even a solution? To what extent will we sweep the problem under the rug by building dumps in poor communities—an African American community in the deep South, an Indian reservation in the West, a farming district in the Midwest, an economically depressed area in the Appalachian Mountains?

Since this is a story of ordinary people's resistance to a perceived injustice, it is important to let the men and women speak for themselves. Dialogue is therefore critical to the story. I have reconstructed this history from videotaped conversations, personal diaries and journals, newspaper reports, and people's memories, including my own. I have formally interviewed nearly fifty people and transcribed their comments onto more than 1,500 pages of text, and I have spoken to scores of others while checking the facts in the story.

Writing history always includes editing. All historians decide that some meetings are more important than others, that some people are critical to the central story and others are marginal, that some motives essentially contributed to a person's action while others did not. Conversations are the same. Although I have tried to be true to the issues and thoughts that people expressed in those conversations and even true to their style of speaking, I have had to condense them and rework them for the printed page. In the vast majority of instances, I created the dialogues from quotations in newspaper articles and from videotapes. (See Sources for a more complete explanation about the historical accuracy of the dialogues.)

Almost all of the people quoted in this story are still living in my county. I have known some of them personally for a long time; I got to know others quite well while protesting alongside them and interviewing them. I hope that they will respond as Sheriff Larry Scholes did when I read

him my account of a meeting that he had with three state troopers from Albany: "I can't swear every word is exact, but I have no corrections to make; I got goosebumps when you read it, because you sent me back there." When I once wrote a religious history of people in the Old South, I had to imagine that they would think I got it right. Here, as I've checked and rechecked many events, the protagonists have already helped me to make many corrections.

My biggest regret is eliminating so many people's activities and stories in creating this unified narrative. Many will believe that I have left out important details and events. Literally hundreds of people spent days organizing marches and rallies, writing and singing songs, planning concerts and holding bake sales, creating quilts that traveled around the nation telling Allegany County's story, making huge pots of food to feed frozen protesters at the sites, writing letters to the editor, calling their friends and neighbors. Perhaps Stuart Campbell, one of the founders of the nonviolent resistance movement, should have the final word here: "We wouldn't have won if there was one less person. Everyone was essential!"

I am indebted to many people for their help. First, the newspaper reporters. I have read hundreds of their stories in researching and writing this book. Their exceptional work and extraordinary accuracy provided the basis for this story. Foremost among them are Kathryn Ross of *The Wellsville Daily Reporter* and Joan Dickenson of *The Olean Times Herald*. Videotapes that Peer Bode, a video artist at Alfred University, graciously shared with me were also very helpful; he and his students took many hours of footage during the conflicts between protesters and police.

I also want to thank Corrine Bandera, who not only helped me to collect these newspaper reports, but also created a system for organizing them. I also used newspaper stories and reports gathered by Pam Lakin that are now part of the special collections at Herrick Memorial Library at Alfred University. Ann Hoffman spent considerable time helping me use a computer to prepare the first map in the book.

From time to time, I called many individuals in the county to check details in the story. I must thank them collectively; they know who they are. I am especially indebted to the people who allowed me to tape and transcribe their interviews. They include the principal characters in the story and many others. I have put an asterisk by their names in the index of names, so I will not repeat the list here. I thank Dan Sass for giving me technical information about the geology of the county, Kathryn Rabuzzi for advice on writing creative nonfiction, and Alan Littell for helping me prepare portions of the manuscript for initial inquiries to publishers.

I owe a tremendous debt to Carol Burdick, Sally Campbell, Stuart Campbell, and Gary Ostrower, friends and colleagues who provided me with assistance in writing this book throughout all of its stages. They encouraged me to undertake the project and gave me confidence and advice along the way. They read several versions of the manuscript and helped to fine tune both its content and its style. The book has been vastly improved by their help. Lou Ruprecht and Ward Churchill also read the manuscript critically and suggested strategies for publication. In addition to them, I appreciate the efforts of Eric Somer and Megan Staffel Marks in helping to find a publisher.

I thank Craig Prophet for his work on creating four of the five maps for the book and am especially grateful that Steve Myers agreed to share his artistic photographs for use in the book.

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Prologue

DECEMBER 7, 1989—

THE SHERIFF OF ALLEGANY COUNTY leaned back in his chair and considered his chances for reelection. Three months earlier he had resolved to put thoughts about his future on the back burner and focus on the difficult task that lay ahead. He had, in fact, convinced himself that his career in law enforcement was over. Only a couple of weeks earlier he had told the district attorney at lunch that no one would elect him dogcatcher after this whole affair was over. “What I’ll have to do in the next few months will make me the most unpopular guy in the county.”

Larry Scholes knew that in normal times a sheriff can assure his reelection by enforcing the law impartially, by preserving the peace, and by maintaining personal integrity. But these were not normal times. The citizens were unified against putting a nuclear dump in the county and many of them were willing to act outside the law, committing acts of nonviolent resistance. Far worse, Scholes feared that some people might start shooting.

“Sheriff” is the only elected law enforcement position in the United States, making sheriffs’ departments unusually responsive to citizens’ needs. This is the reason why many people bring problems to their county sheriffs more frequently than they do to state and local police. Allegany County in western New York was, however, an exception. Sparsely populated and relatively poor, it was one of only two counties in New York State that did not have its own road patrol. For all practical purposes the state police were the primary law enforcement agency in the county.

Sheriff Larry Scholes glanced up at his calendar, noting that it was Pearl Harbor Day. He was awaiting a delegation of state troopers to discuss a looming battle between protesters and the New York State siting commission,

charged with finding a suitable place to build a nuclear waste dump. Scholes was pleased that the state police had requested the meeting. He was puzzled, though, that three high-level troopers from the superintendent's Albany office were driving nearly three hundred miles to conduct it. Usually, Lieutenant McCole, who was in charge of the district office, or Captain Browning from the regional office near Buffalo would ask for a meeting to coordinate efforts between the agencies. The state police must have recognized, Scholes surmised, that the sheriff's department in Allegany County could not handle large-scale protests, and they were preparing to take charge. The troopers from the superintendent's office in Albany, he figured, were coming to muscle him out of the way.

The sheriff had mixed feelings about this possibility. He approved of the state police taking primary responsibility for enforcing the state's efforts to site a nuclear dump, but he hoped he could still play a role in keeping things peaceful. During the last six months, he had carefully cultivated relations with leaders in the anti-dump movement in order to assure them that he and his men would remain calm. He had never identified with the movie image of the "gun totin'" sheriff who bullied hoodlums into submission. In fact, he rarely carried a gun and never wore a star on his chest; his uniform was a white shirt and tie, with a fleece-lined leather jacket for cold weather.

Larry Scholes had joined the sheriff's department on April Fool's Day 1973, when he was twenty-four years old; he was appointed undersheriff two years later. Now forty-one years old, he had just been elected to his third term as sheriff, a position he had held for nearly seven years. The sheriff's department had been his only career.

Now he faced an uncertain future. He knew he would have a serious challenger in the next election, requiring him to spend between three and four thousand dollars, nearly ten percent of his yearly salary. Far worse was his anxiety about providing financial stability for his family.

These personal concerns gave way to even deeper worries about maintaining the peace between irate citizens of the county and the technical team from the siting commission. Scholes had talked with Bill Timberlake, his undersheriff, about handling the protests and coordinating activities with the state police. They concluded that the most reasonable approach would be for the two of them to escort the technical team until it met resistance from the "citizens" (Larry always referred to the protesters as "citizens," even in private conversations). If the protesters insisted on blocking access to the land, then he would call in the state police after calming everyone down.

Scholes took special pride in his ability to defuse tense situations; his primary role, he believed, was to foster peace in the community. He selected deputies whose philosophy about law enforcement coincided with his own.

He had chosen Timberlake as his undersheriff seven years earlier not only because of his experience, but also because Timberlake genuinely liked people, was a sympathetic listener, and had common sense. His most recent job had been with the police in the village of Alfred, one of two college towns in the county. (The other was Houghton, home of a small Christian college affiliated with the Wesleyan Church.) Timberlake knew how to walk into a fraternity party late at night and quiet things down.

In all the ways that mattered Scholes and Timberlake worked well together in promoting community harmony. In other ways they were quite different. Scholes had done all of his law enforcement work locally; Timberlake had spent the first fifteen years of his career as a New York City cop before he and his wife decided to move to a healthier environment. Scholes was trim and meticulously dressed; Timberlake was a bit overweight and slightly rumpled. Newspaper reporters loved writing stories about the sheriff, because his statements were direct, factual, articulate, and grammatically correct. They sometimes wondered, however, whether they were getting the full story. When the undersheriff answered their questions, however, reporters knew that he was speaking unrehearsed, as thoughts continually bubbled to the surface of the conversation. But they were not always sure they had understood the import of what he was saying, and they had a much harder time separating conjecture from fact.

Just then, Timberlake poked his head into the sheriff's office. "Jim's arrived; I took him into the conference room and gave him some coffee."

"I'm glad he got here before the troopers arrived. I want to tell him what we've been thinking." The sheriff had invited district attorney Jim Euken to the meeting. Not only was he a friend, but this would be a good chance to make sure that law enforcement would be coordinated.

"Hello, Jim. I'm glad you came, since you'll be involved in deciding how to prosecute any of the citizens who are arrested. Three high ranking state troopers are coming from Albany to discuss things."

"From Albany? Isn't that rather unusual?"

"It sure is. But nothing like this has ever happened in the county before." The sheriff paused, and the D.A., glancing over at Timberlake, eased himself into a chair at the table. Timberlake raised an eyebrow, suggesting that there was more to this meeting than he had been told.

"I suspect," the sheriff continued, "that the state police have come to tell this country boy that they will be coordinating all activities and that I shouldn't get in the way."

"Well, that should be a relief to you. If the state police play the heavies, you're off the hook." Jim Euken smiled and added, "You might get elected again, after all."



Sheriff Caught in the Middle © Steve Myers 1990; all rights reserved.

Scholes also smiled, but right now he was more concerned about his public responsibilities than his personal future. "Maybe I can convince the state police that I should have some role in keeping everything from escalating into violence. After all, I know these people. Many are friends and neighbors, and it's still my job to keep everyone safe. I hope the police leave Charlie in charge. We work well together."

The sheriff was referring to Lieutenant Charles McCole who commanded the local unit of the state police. They got along well, thought alike, and could almost instinctively read each other's minds. Scholes paused and then said, "But I'm uneasy that Albany's getting so involved."

Timberlake continued Scholes's thought, "Whatever those troopers are here to talk about will be connected with the politics of siting the dump. And if they're coming out of the superintendent's office they'll be representing the governor's interests."

"We'll know soon enough," the sheriff said. To himself, he thought, "Mario Cuomo's henchmen."

Five troopers entered the conference room where the three county officials waited. Scholes and Timberlake warmly greeted the two with whom they'd worked closely. The local troopers introduced their superiors from Albany, two inspectors and a colonel, and the sheriff introduced the district attorney. They sat on opposite sides of the table.

The sheriff smiled. "Well, I guess it's no mystery that you're here to talk about law enforcement problems involving the nuclear dump."

They exchanged some pleasantries, then one of the inspectors got down to business. "The involvement of the sheriff's department is extremely important in local protests. You know the people in your county and are in a much better position than the state police to assist the siting commission."

Scholes stiffened in his chair. He realized the meeting was taking a very different turn than he had expected. The troopers weren't muscling him out of the way, after all; they seemed to be asking him to assume all the responsibility. The inspector continued, "If the state police were to come on the scene, then it's probable that the conflict would escalate."

The inspector paused and let his statement settle into the silence. Scholes found himself saying things that he was sure the troopers already knew. "Of course, we'll be happy to do whatever we can to reduce potential violence. We're certainly willing to accompany the exploration teams to the sites. But as you know, we won't be able to handle any serious difficulties that arise."

"We're sure you can handle the situation."

"You know that we don't have a road patrol. All my officers are exclusively assigned to guard duty in the county jail, except for the two who take

care of civil matters, serving subpoenas and enforcing court orders. That only leaves Bill and me to deal with any protesters. As long as I've been in the sheriff's department, we've called upon the state police for help."

"Of course we'll work on criminal matters—burglaries, murders, and these sorts of things," responded the inspector, "but our success depends on the trust we've developed with the people here. If we get involved in local protests, we'll compromise that trust. Working with the technical team is a civil matter between the courts, the siting commission, and your office."

The sheriff, who always prided himself in remaining calm under fire, bristled. "If people block roads, that's not just a civil matter. The technical team will insist on getting onto the land, and there's no way that Bill and I can accomplish that. The citizens have said they'll do civil disobedience to keep them off the land. So I'll need to call for help."

"Well, since this matter is really one for the sheriff's department," the inspector replied, "you should call mutual aid for support."

Scholes and Timberlake had already considered the option of calling for assistance from the sheriff's departments in surrounding counties. Protocols were in place to invoke "mutual aid" in case of disasters that required a large number of police to respond to a sudden emergency. But here the citizens had already said they would break the law. Invoking mutual aid could easily cost the county well over one hundred thousand dollars after only a couple of encounters. And the sheriff would be solely responsible for siting a nuclear dump among his friends and neighbors.

"It's not clear to me that it's our responsibility to enforce the building of a nuclear dump for the state of New York, even if it's in our county. It seems to me that it's a state matter and therefore a job for the state police."

The inspector leaned forward. "Sheriff, you don't understand. We're telling you that you *will not* call the state police for any reason. You *will* invoke mutual aid. This is your problem and you're going to have to deal with it. The state police *will not* become involved."

Theatrical performance is part of all good law enforcement. Scholes, in fact, was a master in conveying authority or calm by slight changes in the way he looked, spoke, and acted. He used these techniques in public situations where something could easily get out of hand. Right now, however, the sheriff was offended that a fellow officer would bully him. Even worse, it was a bad performance. Lieutenant McCole seemed embarrassed and stared blankly at his hands, looking, Scholes thought, as if he wished he were a hundred miles away.

Scholes dropped his hands to his sides, stared back at the inspector, and lowered his voice. "My oath of office does not permit me to decide which laws of New York State I'll enforce and which laws I won't. Neither does the

state police have the right to enforce certain laws while ignoring others. We've always called upon the state police to help enforce the laws, and we'll continue to do so."

The sheriff knew that anger was surfacing. It was no calculated act, but he had no inclination to stop. "Take this message back to Superintendent Constantine and Governor Cuomo from Sheriff Scholes—that's S-C-H-O-L-E-S. Sheriff Scholes says 'BULLSHIT!'"

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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.

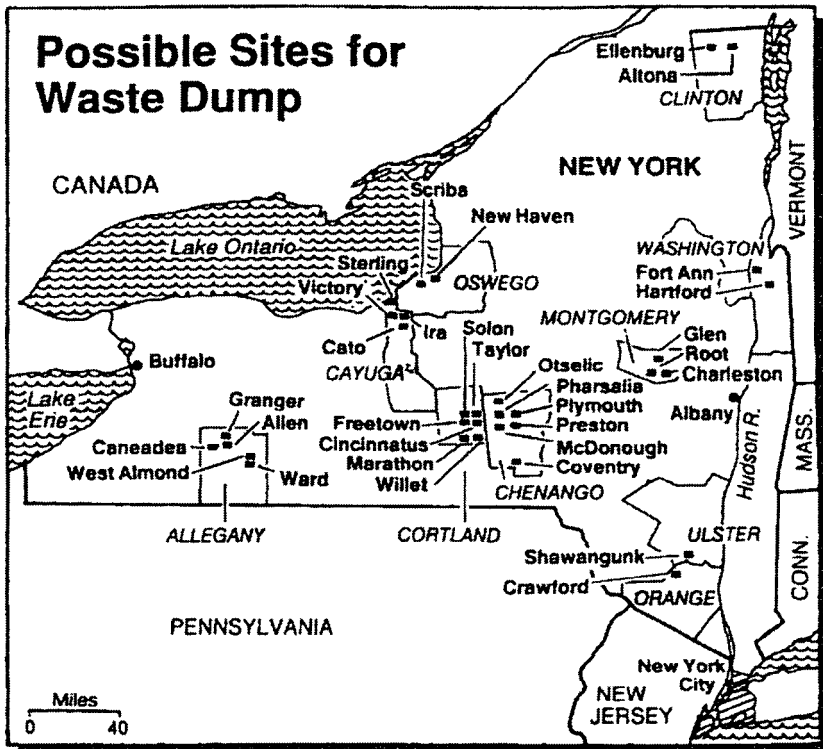
—Carol Mongerson of West Valley Coalition

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



The New York Times/Dec. 21, 1988

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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