

GUEST VIEW

Don't allow Lewiston to set precedent

By Midge Tourbin

Growing up in Lewiston was wonderful. During the 1940s and 1950s we could walk along the Niagara Gorge from the village edge to Niagara University. Along the way my friends and I rested in naturally formed caves and reflected on what it must have been like to live in the days of the early inhabitants.

The paths to Niagara University and the caves that took hundreds of years for nature to create are gone because of the Niagara Power project and the Robert Moses Parkway. The woods, the violets, the winery and its well, the fossils and artifacts, the dump, Burke's Pond and the arch, all are gone. They are now only memories buried under Artpark, the Mini-Plaza, the U.S. Post Office and McCrory's Plaza. Friday's Blue Pike too, have disappeared because of the pollution in the mighty Niagara River, the sand piles are gone at the docks and the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge has been relocated at the top of the updated Lewiston Hill to accommodate the Robert Moses Parkway. For me, Lewiston holds my most fond memories. It is where my family and friends remain and where my heart and roots will always be. That is why I am still pained at what is happening here now. I also recollect practicing my parallel parking at the side of the TNT barn on Pletcher Road in spring of 1952. The barn is gone but its contents, now buried out of sight, are the high-level radioactive remains of the first atomic bomb that was dropped on Japan 50 years ago. It's a twisted fate, don't you agree? The many wondrous joys of my childhood are gone, but 50-plus years later the radioactive wastes remain and bring me and others fear, doubt and concern. We fear that it's not just a coincidence that there is, and has been, an unusually high rate of cancer, lung problems, tumors and autoimmune diseases among the people in the Village of Lewiston and the towns of Lewiston, Porter, Youngstown and Ransomville. We

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worry that at the old TNT site, later called the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and now called the Niagara Falls Storage Site, there lurks other health and environmental time bombs. After all, the site does contain almost one half of the world's supply of mined radium, code-named K-65 by the government.

Now the keeper of the site, the U.S. Department of Energy, intends to "add 5 feet of clay to control erosion." In reality what it is creating is a repository. In government language that is a permanent site. It will be the only permanent radioactive site in the nation. This is a concept directly opposed by the New York state Department of Health, the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In the last few months since learning the Department of Energy's plan, I have read a mountain of books, decoded government abbreviations and waded through the 1986 final Environmental Impact Statement, which in itself is an inch-and-a-half thick. I've attended meetings, written letters and made numerous phone calls. I've debated the issues with myself and agonized over the situation. I am convinced that what the Department of Energy is really undertaking is an experiment for future radioactive repositories. I also believe that once the precedent has been set, it will open the door for further contamination to be brought into the area. Wasn't it the magnetism of the site that

brought in Modern Landfill and Chemical Waste Management? The New York State Low Level Radioactive Waste Siting Commission has been working on a site proposal for three years, and by the end of this year, will come to conclusion. Wouldn't the massive balance of land owned by the U.S. government on Lutts and Balmer roads, and no longer of any use to them, be an ideal site?

It is our right to raise the issue that this permanent capping creates a precedent. It is our right to raise the issue that the Buffalo and Niagara regions, although not on a fault line, have been subject to damages from earthquakes, and that is documented. It is our right to point out that there is indeed a health problem in the area. Come forward, those of you with cancer, tumors, lung problems and autoimmune diseases. Call 1-800-458-1158, extension 402, and find out if your case is recorded. If it's not, put it there. It is up to the Department of Energy to prove that these issues are not something to worry and have doubts about. The Department of Energy has 16,000 highly qualified scientists whom we support. They have yet come up with a technology to confidently confirm that there is a safe system to repose man-made radioactive materials. While they argue, should we agree to let the Department of Energy create a repository in Lewiston and set a precedent? Should we allow Lewiston to be the site of an experiment under the guise of "erosion control?"

While we certainly can't bring back the Lewiston that I knew in decades past or restore the health of its citizens, we can affect what is happening to us now. We must resist what the government is proposing to do. We aren't owned by the U.S. government or the governments of local villages and towns, we are the governments. If we, as adults, don't take a stand, future generations won't have a future. I can't live with that. Can you?

Midge Tourbin lives in Rochester.