

**Taking the Lead**

**Volume 3:**

**Taking On the Fight**

**A project of the Writer's Alliance of  
Newfoundland and Labrador**

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### Introduction

*Taking the Lead* is a collection of essays and personal portraits that highlight the struggle and achievements of a diverse array of individuals, groups, and organizations. The common thread among these movers and shakers is the urge to bring about positive change — to refuse to accept an untenable or ineffective status quo. These are stories of hard-working people, many from the margins of society, who have defied the odds in an effort to improve their own lot, and the lives of others.

But there is also a strong personal component to these stories. Mixed in with the practical, concrete goals of improving how we are governed, how our laws are written, interpreted, and enforced, there is always personal growth. Many of those profiled here undergo a marked change in their spirituality and sense of self-worth. They are not quite the same at the end of their journey as they were at the beginning.

The people in these essays are of all age groups, many races, and both genders. There is also a wide variety of subject matter. Many of the stories deal with women, native people, and children. Readers will meet, among others, an anti-poverty crusader, a native Peacekeeper, a Chinese doctor, and a gay rights activist. There is a story of police insensitivity and brutality a profile of a community-minded, unpretentious priest, and a look at the life work of someone who strives for the personal enrichment of the disabled.

*Taking the Lead* offers stories of people who, either on their own or with others, have fought against what they believe is fundamentally wrong. A catch phrase binding these essays might be: "We're not going to take it!" Or the even more positive: "We're going to make the effort to change it!"

These stories, then, are life affirming in a broad way. They show that positive change, both on a personal and social level, can be brought about by "ordinary" people, that ultimately, we all have to "take the lead."

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*Taking the Lead* is the fifth in a series of literacy projects undertaken by the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. Copies of our other projects, including the *Newfoundland and Labrador ABE Social History Series* and *Working Lives*, may be obtained by contacting our office:

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### Politics and Prayer: The Lantern

Paul Butler

#### Word List

**Hierarchy:** An organization in which some people have more power than others; a group in which only a small number of people are in charge.

**Catholic Church:** The first Christian organization, started nearly 2000 years ago. One of the main Christian denominations. Referred to by Catholics (and in this essay) as "the Church."

**Nuns:** Female members of the Catholic Church who have made a vow to serve God. Also known as "sisters."

**Diocese:** District served by a bishop; several parishes.

**Parish:** A small area of a town or countryside served by a priest and a church.

**Sacrament:** Special ceremony presided over by the priest: holy communion, baptism, marriage, confession, etc:

**Social justice:** The aim or goal of putting an end to poverty; the fair and even distribution of money, food, and shelter.

**Social injustice:** Lack of equality; the absence of a fair and even distribution of money, food, and shelter.

**Institution:** A large powerful system or organization.

**Solidarity:** A feeling of support and encouragement.

**Radical:** Challenging; wanting change; going against an institution or hierarchy.

**Jubilee:** An anniversary; a celebration of a person or event.

**Vigil:** Staying awake to watch over something, often for a spiritual reason.

### Introduction: A Nun's Role — At the Bottom of the Church Hierarchy

The Catholic Church is a "hierarchical" organization. This means that there are people in charge who tell the people below them what to do.

1. The Pope is at the head of the Church. The Pope is believed by many in the Catholic Church to be "infallible." This means he is incapable of making a mistake. Popes are elected (chosen) for life.
2. The Pope is elected from among the Church's cardinals. Cardinals are immediately below the Pope in the Church's hierarchy.
3. Below cardinals are the archbishops. An archbishop is in charge of a large area or province that is made up of many "dioceses."
4. Further down the hierarchy are the bishops. Each bishop is in charge of a diocese. A diocese is an area made up of several parishes.
5. Below the bishops are the priests who oversee a single parish.
6. At the lowest level of the organization are the nuns.

The further down the hierarchy a person is, the less say they have in the running of the Catholic Church. The place of women in the Catholic Church is very limited. Women cannot be priests. This means they cannot perform the sacraments like marriage or holy communion. The highest position a woman can have is to be a nun. Nuns, or sisters, have taken a vow to serve God. But they must play a very small and limited role in doing so. Nuns are not expected to speak out for social justice. Their ideas and criticisms about the running of the Church are not welcome. The Church does not expect nuns to play a role in shaping the Church of the future.

This essay will discuss a small group of nuns in St. John's who *do* speak out. They protest against poverty and social injustice. They also criticize the Catholic Church. These nuns run a centre in St. John's called "The Lantern." There are five sisters in all who run The Lantern. They are members of an order of nuns called the Presentation Sisters. In March, 2000, I spoke to two of these sisters: Dolores Hall and Marie Ryan.



*Marie Ryan and Dolores Hall.*

The five nuns of The Lantern have found a way to speak their minds. They have found a way to challenge the rules of the Church hierarchy. If they do not like what the Church is doing, they say so for everyone to hear. If they do not like what is happening in society — to poor people for instance — they speak out loudly in protest.

Every protest these sisters make is really two protests. If they protest against an injustice in society they also rebel against the role their Church expects them to play. The decision to speak out is a moral one. The *process* of speaking out is political. And for Dolores and Marie it is political in this double sense. When people challenge a powerful organization like the Catholic Church, it is like swimming against the tide. They must find friends who feel the same way and are willing to show support.

### **The Beginnings: Working Underground**

"In the 1970s, we — the nuns — were institutionalized," Sister Marie Ryan tells me. By this she means they were very small cogs within a large and powerful system. In this case, the large and powerful system was the Catholic Church. "Our chief role, as far as the Church was concerned," Marie remembers, "was to teach in schools. And after this, when we retired, the thing to do was to work in a parish under the direction of a priest."

Some of the sisters wanted to do a different type of work. They wanted to be more active and more independent. They looked to the Gospels, the part of the Bible that describes the life of Jesus. There they saw a challenge. Jesus wanted people, men and women, to play an active role in changing the world. If some people were poor while others were rich, something was wrong. Something needed to be changed. Marie Ryan and Dolores Hall felt the Gospels called Christians to work for this change. They believed they must speak out on the side of people who are poor, sick, or shut out from society.

But in the 1970s, only people high up in the Catholic Church could talk about such things. Only the Pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops could criticize society and call for change. Nuns were not expected to do this. They were expected to be gentle and passive. They were expected to know their place.

This made nuns like Marie and Dolores feel very frustrated. They had studied the Bible and they knew the history of the Catholic Church. They believed something had gone very wrong with their Church. It no longer tried to do what Jesus did in the Gospels.

### **The Seeds of Change: Vatican II and the Reforming Pope**

The first encouragement the sisters had was from the Catholic Church itself. That was a long time ago, in 1962. At that time the Catholic Church appeared to be changing. It was becoming less strict. The Pope at the time, John XXIII (Pope John 23rd), wanted the Church to be more open to ordinary people. He wanted the Church to be less hierarchical.

Pope John XXIII called the bishops of the Catholic Church to a series of meetings. These meetings are known as "Vatican II" (Vatican Two). They talked about how the Church was failing to meet the needs of ordinary people. They talked about how the Church should help the poor, and how it should welcome criticism. To many Catholics, Vatican II seemed like a new beginning for their Church.

"We were all very much moved by the spirit of Vatican II," Dolores says. "It was a great influence."

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has gone back to its old ways. It does not accept criticism. It bans books about the Catholic Church that it does not agree with. And, so the sisters of The Lantern believe, it is not helping those who are most in need.

But that doesn't stop sisters like Dolores Hall and Marie Ryan from working towards the vision of change in Vatican II. And there are many Catholic people around the world who feel the same way. They have formed their own organizations. Some of these are fairly small like The Lantern. But some are large international groups.

One of these large organizations is called "We Are Church." Dolores and Marie belong to the Canadian branch of "We Are Church." This is called "Catholics of Vision." Belonging to this organization helps them, Dolores says. It gives them support and encouragement when times are hard.

Being connected to others who feel the same way is a vital part of any political struggle. This is often called "solidarity." Solidarity helps people to stay hopeful. There is power in numbers.

### **Becoming Visible and Making Contact**

Marie and Dolores say they became more outspoken in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, they found more and more things to protest against. In Canada, poor people were being given a hard time. The government was cutting social spending. They were paying unemployed people less and less. It was harder for people with disabilities. Child poverty was increasing. And at the same time banks — which had a lot of money — no longer had to pay tax. It seemed that the government was looking after the richest people in society. This was not just happening in Canada, but all over the world. Life was becoming easier for rich businesses and harder for ordinary people.

During the 1980s and 1990s the sisters joined many activist groups in Newfoundland. These were non-religious groups. Activists are people who fight for political change. Dolores and Marie became part of groups like the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO). They also joined the Coalition for Equality.

Here are some of the events and protests The Lantern sisters organized or took part in during the 1990s.

- A monthly Silent Vigil in the lobby of Confederation Building in St. John's to show solidarity for government employees who had lost their jobs due to cutbacks (1996 to 1997).
- Protests against \$500-a-plate fundraising dinners held by the federal Liberal Party at the Hotel Newfoundland in St. John's (1996 to 1999).
- A march in downtown St. John's to protest against the major banks not having to pay tax (1996).

For The Lantern sisters, all these events were two protests in one. Not only were they fighting for political change in the world around them. They were also rebelling against the role their Church wanted them to play. The hierarchy of the Church did not want nuns to become activists. It preferred them to keep out of sight.

Oxfam, the Coalition for Equality and the National Anti-Poverty Organization were also involved in all of the above protests. In fighting for political change, these organizations helped each other. They shared information and gave each other a feeling of solidarity. Each group or organization had a different way of doing things. But they had the same aim of making the world fairer and easier for poor people.

Dolores and Marie knew they had an important role to play. They knew people wanted to talk about what was going wrong in the world. And they felt they could take the lead in one way: they could show people how these changes in the world were un-Christian. The sisters realized it was time to reclaim their church.

### **"We Are Church": Reclaiming Christianity and Starting The Lantern**

"The true Christian church is the many ordinary men and women who want to follow the example of Jesus," says Marie. It is not a group of buildings, or the bishops, or the Pope. It is not the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.



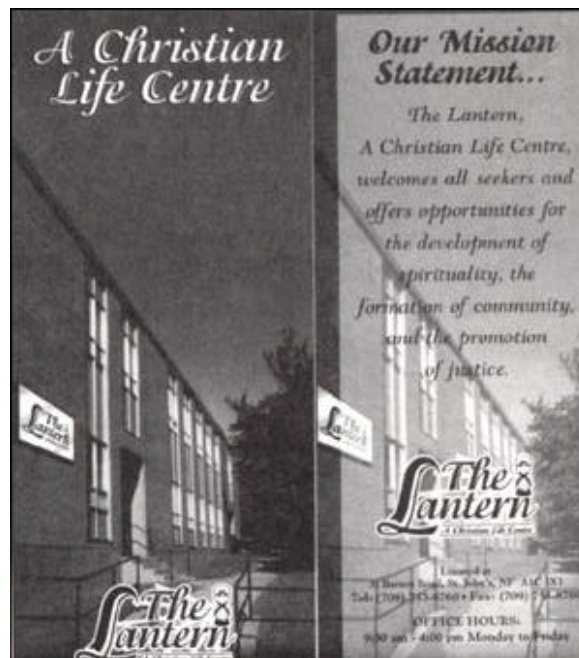
## Taking The Lead

## Taking On The Fight

The phrase Dolores uses most often is "we are church," which is also the name of the group in which she is involved. Declaring "we are church" is a very bold political statement. It goes against the will of the Catholic Church. It is saying that the hierarchy of the Church has no right to tell them what is Christian and what is not Christian.

By 1995, the five sisters of The Lantern met often. "We had a dream of providing a centre for spirituality, a sense of community and justice," Marie says. "Spirituality" is different from "religion," Marie explains. The word "spirituality" means how we are part of creation, connected to everything and everyone around us. "Watching a sunset could be more spiritual to you than kneeling down in a church," she says.

So by 1995, the sisters were a group of people with a joint goal. They planned to hold classes on social justice. They wanted to invite guest speakers from national and international organizations. This would help create solidarity. Most of all they wanted to form a sense of community. They wanted people who felt unhappy with the Catholic Church to have a place to go. They were going to create a church of the people.



*The Lantern opens in 1997.*

First they needed a building and approval from their order, the Presentation Sisters. The Presentation Sisters owned several buildings. Some of these were used as schools. But the mid-90s was a time of change in the Newfoundland school system. Many of the schools were closing and were no longer being used.

There were about 160 Presentation Sisters in all. They had a "Board." A Board is a small number of people that makes decisions for a large group. The five sisters needed to convince this Board that The Lantern was a good idea.

Not everyone agreed with the views held by these five sisters. Some people felt the sisters were too radical. They challenged the Church too much and they got too involved in politics. Some people were not happy with this. Many people within the Catholic Church do not mind its hierarchical nature. They do not want to rock the boat or challenge authority.

So the sisters of The Lantern were not sure their plan would be approved. Luckily, though, the Presentation Sisters are a teaching order. And many of the things that were to take place in The Lantern were a kind of teaching. This made it easier for the Board to approve the plans to start The Lantern.

When an old school building on Barnes Road became available in 1997, the Presentation Sisters allowed The Lantern to start up there. From that time onwards The Lantern has been up and running.

This is The Lantern's Mission Statement. (A Mission Statement explains why an organization exists.)

"The Lantern, A Christian Life Centre, welcomes all seekers and offers opportunities for the development of spirituality, the formation of community and the promotion of justice."

### What Does The Lantern Do?

The Lantern is a rather large building. It is actually bigger than the sisters really wanted. There is a library that has books about social justice. There are offices and classrooms. There is a very large hall. The Lantern gives a number of classes to adults.

Here are some of the events and courses held at The Lantern:

- Parent Effectiveness
- Twelve-step Programs (a system that helps in personal development)
- Prayer Workshops
- Personality Tests
- Scripture (Bible) Studies
- Social Justice Events
- Retreats
- Ecological Action Groups (Nature and Pollution)

Some of these classes are about the Bible. When the nuns of The Lantern talk about the Bible they make it relevant to today. They get people to think about what Jesus would be doing today if he were alive.

This is a radical thing to do. It challenges people because it shows how Jesus would want society to change. It shows how he would not be happy with some people being rich and others poor, and how he might feel we should be kinder to the earth. It also shows people that Jesus would be very unhappy with the Catholic Church.

The sisters often bring in guest speakers and advertise their events in the newspaper. An example is a series of talks about Jubilee 2000 held in recent years. Jubilee 2000 is an international movement. It is linked to "We Are Church" and to "Catholics of Vision." Jubilee 2000 stands for peace, an end to poverty and respect for the earth. It is called Jubilee 2000 because it celebrates the life of Jesus who was on the earth 2000 years ago.

The Jubilee 2000 organization believes that wealth should be shared out fairly among all people and all countries. It believes that debts between countries should be forgiven.

Poor countries often owe a great deal of money to rich countries. These debts tend to get larger and larger every year. This is not because the poor country borrows more money each year. It is because of the "interest" on the debt.

Interest is extra money the borrower has to pay the lender. This is above and beyond the amount that the poor country borrows. Interest grows on its own and is added to the debt. So these growing debts keep poor countries down. It can be impossible for the poor country to get out of debt, or out of poverty. Countries often stay poor because they can never pay off a debt.

Organizations like Jubilee 2000 are swimming against the tide of Canadian and world politics. Rich countries benefit from the interest that is owed to them. Canada is one of these wealthy countries. It wants to receive the interest on loans. But The Lantern agrees with Jubilee 2000. Countries stay poor because of these debts. And extreme poverty — in India for example — means many people starve to death every day. People's lives, the sisters believe, are more important than money.

### **The Cost of Political Leadership**

Some of the nuns who run The Lantern do not go to church every Sunday. They believe that a group of people praying and thinking about God is a church. A church, they believe, does not need a priest. It does not need the vestments — the special clothes a priest wears. It does not need an altar — the table that has been blessed by a bishop. These things are not so important.

Dolores and Marie want to remind people that it is they — the people — who are the church. This is part of their leadership. They want to help people who are put off by the hierarchical ways of the Catholic Church.

Poor people and activists are often turned off by the idea of religion. They feel that churches like the Catholic Church have let them down. They feel the Catholic Church has not taken enough action towards social justice. But sisters like Marie Ryan and Dolores Hall feel that people can take the lead themselves. They do not need the official Church to do it for them.

This does not mean that they have cut ties with the official Church. They work hard to keep communications between themselves and the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church open. They know that there are people inside the Catholic Church who are working for the good, too. So they often work in parishes, taking part in church services.

There is always a cost to political leadership. Marie Ryan found this when one parish where she used to speak no longer wanted her to be involved. The parish did not approve of what she was doing at The Lantern. They did not think she should be so outspoken. Some people like to keep religion separate from politics. They resent it when a religious person says what is wrong with society.

When it comes to this cost, Marie Ryan is accepting. She knows, as all The Lantern sisters do, that her work may be held against her. This does not make her hesitate about what she sees as her duty.

### **Learning the Tactics of Protest**

The sisters of The Lantern discover new ways to take political action all the time. Political protest is often hard. Protestors have to plan if they are to be successful. When people want political change it is sometimes a good idea to break the rules. This is sometimes the only way protestors can get their message across.

Dolores Hall discovered this when she went to the Vatican City State in Rome, Italy. The Vatican is a gated, enclosed, small city within the city of Rome. It is run and owned by the Catholic Church. The Pope lives there.

The huge Cathedral of St. Peter's is in the middle of the Vatican. It is the largest church building in the world and the very centre of the Catholic Church.

## Taking The Lead

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Dolores was with her organization "We Are Church." They planned to protest on the steps of St. Peter's. This was a daring thing to do. The Catholic Church does not allow protests within the Vatican.

But "We Are Church" wanted to break the rules.

They had many demands. Among them were these:

- The Catholic Church should be more involved in social justice.
- The Catholic Church should accept gay people in society and in the Church.
- The Church should allow people to write and say what they believed to be true.
- Women should be allowed to become priests, bishops, etc.
- Divorced people should be allowed to take sacraments: holy communion, confession, etc.

"We Are Church" knew that their protests would not be welcome. But they went ahead anyway. The protestors arrived at the steps with banners. These banners were immediately taken from them by the Swiss Guards. The Swiss Guards are the special police who guard the Pope and the Vatican. The protestors had expected this. They also had scarves and hats with "We Are Church" written on them. The Swiss Guards could not remove these because they were part of the protestors' clothing.

In the end, the Swiss Guards allowed two of the protestors inside St. Peter's. They took their petition to a bishop. This bishop was very high up in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. This is what the protestors had wanted — to get their message across.

## The Individual and the Political

The Lantern links up with worldwide organizations. But it also does work that is local, based in St. John's. Sometimes the sisters work one-on-one. In other words, they may talk to individuals about their life and their feelings, about the spiritual side of their lives.

"Some people ask us how this is political," Marie says. "They ask what this has to do with justice." The answer Dolores and Marie give is that every individual person is political. Dolores tells me a good example here is The Lantern's courses in "parent effectiveness." How we bring up our children has a huge effect on what our society will be like in the future, she says. It is part of justice and it is part of spirituality.

The sisters do not see individuals as being separate from their environments. How people feel inside affects how they feel about the world. If people are happy and contented in themselves, they are more likely to see good in others. If they see good in others, they are more likely to see the harm in political injustices. They can see the harm in laws and government decisions that hurt the poor, both here and around the world.

The sisters of The Lantern believe that people desire a just and fair world. This is a need that everybody carries in them. People are happiest, they believe, when they are working in some way towards this end.

## Sources

The source for this essay is an interview with Sister Marie Ryan and Sister Dolores Hall in March, 2000.

### **Politics and Prayer: The Lantern**

#### **Questions for Discussion**

##### **Introduction: A Nun's Role - At the Bottom of the Church Hierarchy**

1. How is the Catholic Church hierarchical?
2. In what ways were the sisters who started The Lantern swimming against the tide of the Church?

##### **The Beginnings: Working Underground**

1. What does Marie Ryan mean when she says the nuns used to be institutionalized?
2. How did Marie Ryan and Dolores Hall feel about the role their Church expected them to play?

##### **The Seeds of Change: Vatican II and the Reforming Pope**

1. When did the meetings known as Vatican II take place?
2. How does "Catholics of Vision" help Dolores Hall and Marie Ryan?

##### **Becoming Visible and Making Contacts**

1. How did things get worse for poor people in Canada in the 1990s?

##### **"We Are Church": Reclaiming Christianity and Starting The Lantern**

1. When the sisters who run The Lantern say, "We Are Church," who do they mean by "we"?
2. How many nuns are there altogether in the Presentation Sisters?
3. Why did some people disagree with the views of the five sisters who started The Lantern?
4. Why do you think the sisters called their organization "The Lantern"?

##### **What Does The Lantern Do?**

1. What is Jubilee 2000?
2. Why do debts keep poor countries down?

##### **The Cost of Political Leadership**

1. What price did Marie Ryan pay for her work at The Lantern?
2. How does she feel about paying this price?

##### **Learning the Tactics of Protest**

1. Why did Dolores feel it was justified for her protest to break the rules?
2. What did "We Are Church" gain by breaking the rules of the Vatican?

##### **The Individual and the Political**

1. In what sense is every person political?

### Skateboarding in St. John's Agnes Walsh

#### Introduction



Photo: John Sparkes  
*Cabbage stalefish grab.*

It's summertime in St. John's, Newfoundland. The trees are in full bloom, the scent of lilac perfumes the air. Birds dart to and fro and traffic seems to move more slowly than in winter. That could be because people are people-watching. Sunbathers lie in the grass or sit on benches, and coffee drinkers sip their brew at tables on the sidewalks. The city is abuzz with pedestrians, their smiling faces thankful for the warmth of the sun.

Downtown at the War Memorial on Duckworth Street stands a group of teenage boys. They are clustered around two police officers who stand in the shadow of the large bronze statue in the centre. Several of the boys hang their heads and others stare at the passing traffic. The police do not look too happy and seem to be writing out tickets. Like the skateboarders themselves, it is a common sight at the War Memorial. There are often run-ins between police and the skateboarders.

#### What is Skateboarding Anyway?

Skateboarding came into being in California in the mid-'60s. At the time, surfing was the big sport. In fact surfing was so big in California in the 1960s that a huge cult grew up around it. There were surfing movies and there was surfing music. Chances are that the surfers developed the skateboard from the surfboard as a way to practise while on dry land. It has been enormously popular as a sport in its own right from that time on.

The skateboard is usually made of maple wood and the standard size is thirty inches long by seven inches wide. It has two wheels on either side in the front and the same in the back. The skaters use steps or ramps to practise their tricks. The tricks can be any variation of moves or jumps that involve trying to catch the board between their feet before the board hits the ground. The sport takes a lot of patience and much practice if a skater wants to keep learning new tricks.



Photo: John Sparkes  
*Ed Hanlon, hard flip.*

### **Who Skateboards?**

While it is mostly a sport of urban areas, skateboarding is not just found in cities. It's mainly a male sport; few girls get into skateboarding on a steady basis. The sport appeals mainly to those in their teens and early twenties. There is definitely a "look" that goes with skateboarding. It is a clothing style that emphasizes the casual: pants so baggy it looks like two people could fit inside one pair; long, loose t-shirts; big sneakers; a baseball cap, usually turned backwards; and, if the weather is chilly, a baggy sweatshirt-type sweater.

While they are a style, these clothes also make sense because the general bagginess leaves lots of room for the moving and stretching that the sport requires.

### **Where to Skateboard?**

The ideal place to skateboard is a skateboard park — if you can find one. The next best place is anywhere with steps, preferably a long series of them. Skateboard parks come equipped with curved ramps so the skater can get up speed to practise tricks. A good skateboard park will have several big ramps all around it and, in the middle, smaller ramps or squares. Public places with steps at least get a skateboarder practising, and such places are good for beginners if there is no skateboard park available.

### **Where Not to Skate**

Definitely not at the War Memorial in downtown St. John's. That is why the police officers were talking to those teens on that bright, summer day. Skateboarding has been banned at the War Memorial.

In fact, skateboarding is against the law in all of downtown St. John's. The War Memorial area was a very popular spot for skateboarders until 1996. That was the year the city passed a bylaw prohibiting skateboarding in the downtown area. Young people still gather there on fine days. Even skateboarders still go there, but not without risk. Fines can cost the skaters anywhere from \$12 to \$60, and the police do lay charges.

### Why the Bad Rap?

What is so bad about skateboarding in public places? First, let's look at one very controversial place — the War Memorial in downtown St. John's. As everyone knows, a war memorial has a purpose: to honour those who fought for their country in one of the wars. It honours those who laid down their lives so that others could live in freedom and peace. Members of the Royal Canadian Legion see it as their mandate to ensure that the sacrifices of these veterans are not forgotten.

The upkeep of the War Memorial grounds, and of the monument itself, is the responsibility of the provincial government's Works, Services, and Transportation department. The war veterans have a committee in place to monitor the condition of the monument. It has reported over the years that the monument has been used as a gathering place for youth, and for skateboarders in particular.

The war veterans feel that these gatherings do not show the proper respect for the site and what it represents. L. Taylor French is the president of the Royal Canadian Legion, Newfoundland and Labrador Command. Mr. French wrote the Evening Telegram in the mid '90s saying that, "Over the past number of years, respect for the War Memorial has declined drastically, with skateboarders causing damage and people using the area as a place to congregate, oftentimes for activities unbecoming the respect which is due."

It is not only the veterans who feel this way. Many ordinary citizens also feel the monument should not be used as a gathering place. They feel it should be a place to remember and respect our war dead.

It is not just the War Memorial, however, from which the skateboarders are banned. You can see signs forbidding skateboarding in many public places, such as corner stores, malls, and libraries. It is also illegal to skateboard on sidewalks. Several years ago someone reported that a woman was knocked down by a skateboarder. Since then a city-wide ban has been in place. Rarely does one see someone skateboarding on a sidewalk, but certain public places like the War Memorial are still used despite the risk of a fine.

### What's a Kid to Do?

Django Malone has skateboarded his way through his teens. He has always loved the sport and he would seldom go anywhere without his skateboard in hand. These days he is more involved with mountain-biking, but he remembers well the days when skateboarding was his life. It was a life of fun, fresh air, and of fighting opposition to the sport he loved.

"Lots of us kids lived downtown, or close to downtown," Django says. "We took our skateboards everywhere. The War Memorial was a meeting place and a practice place." It was also a place to get a ticket. "I know a guy who had to quit skateboarding because he couldn't pay the tickets anymore. He owed the city over \$200."

Django and his friends formed the Association for Skaters' Rights, a group to lobby for fair treatment of skateboarders. In June, 1996, more than 200 skateboarders demonstrated their sport on the steps of City Hall and then moved inside to hijack the City Council meeting. Their parents came with them.

The skateboarders demanded that Council stop discriminating against them. They asked the Council to lift the city-wide ban on skateboards and roller-blades. Django Malone made his point, saying, "How can you expect us to respect the law when the law doesn't listen to us? We are kids, we should be allowed to practise our sport outdoors."

The outcome of the demonstration was that Council recommended the skaters appoint several young people to meet with the parks and recreation committee to come up with some solutions.



### Where to Skate?

If you live downtown and you can't skate downtown, then where do you skate? For the longest time, the answer was nowhere. The kids were left to roam around with skateboards dangling from their hands like oversized flippers.

Sure, lots of kids took chances at the War Memorial. They skated the steps and when a cop was spotted they would grab their boards and run as fast and as far as their legs could carry them.

But the skateboarders were not going to go away just because there was nowhere to skate. This was not merely a fad that would one day fade away. While some skaters might move on to other sports as they got older, there would always be younger skaters looking for a place to learn. In the downtown area, before and after the ban, the skaters gathered in several places: the War Memorial, Harbourside Park, and on the steps of the Colonial Building. But there was no legal place to skate.

In the late '90s, several indoor places were tried. One at Feildian Gardens didn't last long. The kids like to skate outdoors. Another venue was Boardertown SK8 Park on James Lane. Despite letters of opposition from area residents, council approved the facility. Neighbours were concerned, despite the fact that the area has been zoned commercial. Why? In the past, area residents have been plagued by problems from previous tenants. In any event, the James Lane place never did get off the ground.

### Missing the Point

Indoor skateboarding facilities just don't cut it. The skaters want to be outdoors and that's all there is to it. The skaters also want to be downtown. Housing the skaters works for some, and it works for a while. But it has never stopped the flow of youth from gathering in the downtown and running the risk of fines. The kids want to be outside, and on a sunny summer day most parents want their kids out there too.

"Indoors just doesn't work," says John Sparkes of Ballistic, a sports store in downtown St. John's. "In the long run it isn't for this kind of sport. Look at the park in Halifax: it's fantastic. Lots of space, good ramps, and it's right downtown in the open air."

"We are so behind in this city" says Ian Maddigan, a friend of John's. Both Ian and John are avid skateboarders. "Even smaller places on the island like Corner Brook and Stephenville have outdoor facilities, and good ones. It seems like St. John's has a thing against us. The city is hoping we'll just go away but time has proven that the sport of skateboarding is here to stay."

Ballistic does a dynamic business. Their skateboards sell anywhere from \$20 to \$200. They wear out, crack, and have to be replaced every couple of months, depending on use. The way John and Ian talk, this sport is serious and is taken seriously everywhere but here.

"There is a book about the sport which is currently on *The New York Times* bestseller list," says John, "so you can't tell me that this isn't a big and serious sport." Both young men say a downtown park would be fantastic. There is available space, they say, but unless some kind-hearted millionaire property owner donates a vacant lot to the city for skateboarding, there isn't much hope of seeing their dream fulfilled.

### A Portable Place

St. John's does now have an outdoor skateboarding park. Well ... sort of. In 1998, the city proposed building a portable skateboard park and setting it up at Memorial Stadium parking lot. Portable is the key word here. Since it seems that no neighbourhood wants a skateboard park in its backyard, council has decided to try one out on a "moveable" basis. There was very little opposition in the Stadium

area, so the city went ahead and began constructing the ramps for the portable park. The cost was around \$25,000. It is still there today and it is used.



Photo: John Sparkes

*Ian Maddigan, blunt pivot.*

John at Ballistic says it exists, yes, but he won't use it. "It is very poorly designed," he explains. "No one in the store was consulted and we are experienced skaters, besides being well-read on the sport."

The ramps at the park were not designed to take the very important mathematics of the sport into consideration, such as distance between ramps, or concerns for landing safety. The portable park does little to make sure that the spot is truly usable and safe for skaters. The portable facility can be moved if necessary. In fact, the Memorial Stadium site can only be used when nothing is going on at the stadium.

The park is far from perfect, but it is at least an acknowledgement that skateboarders need a place to skate. At least they are not harassed.

### **The Law on their Side**

Peter Miller, a city councillor, has been behind the idea of a skateboard park since he first heard about the problems at the War Memorial. It seemed like common sense to him. If there were a fair number of skateboarders with no place to go except where they were not wanted, then why not build a place for them? But he acknowledges that finding a central place may be difficult. Everyone, and especially the skaters, wants one downtown. That is where kids gather.

Councillor Mifier has been very much in favour of using the parking lot behind the Colonial Building off Military Road in St. John's for a skateboarding park. That space is right next to the playground in Bannerman Park. The city owns the property so there would be no difficulty in acquiring the land.

But Council said no because the neighbours wouldn't agree to it. The same thing happened in the Mundy Pond area. The neighbours said forget it. "Skateboarding has probably got the highest opposition of any sport activity in the city of St. John's," says Miller. "We grew up playing hockey and basketball, and we understand these sports. Skateboarding is a relatively new thing to a generation which seems to be conservative in its thinking."

He is glad that there is at least a temporary facility up and running for the skaters, but he would like more. He thinks the city could use at least five areas for the skateboarders. These could be spread out into different wards of the city.



Photo: Peter Miller

*The Commons in Halifax.*

The numbers of skaters are there and he also believes that they won't go away. In fact, he thinks the numbers will increase with each summer.

### **An Uncertain Future**

The skateboard park in Halifax looks like a place any St. John's skater would die for. It has a mound for the kids to skate up onto, and ramps all over the place. There are benches for the skaters to rest on and for the general public to sit and watch the kids practise their skills. The skaters melt into the general public in a pretty normal way. They are just kids enjoying the sunshine and physical activity in the open air. All this takes place in the middle of the city.

"Oh, sure - we'd give our eye -teeth for a place like Halifax has," says Ian Maddigan. "But I don't see that happening here."

Will the skateboarding protest group start up again? "I doubt it," Ian says. "We tried. We did what we could."

Maybe some other kids coming up will take on the challenge and fight City Hall to get what they want. Since the skateboarders won't go away then perhaps their day will come. Perhaps a downtown space can be found for the youth to enjoy their sport with no fear of costly fines. Ideally skaters will get a place where they can have fun and the public can enjoy watching them.

### **Sources**

Interviews with: Peter Miller, Django Malone, Ian Maddigan, John Sparkes, Bob Pearce.

### Skateboarding in St. John's

#### Questions for Discussion

##### Introduction

1. Discuss what was happening at the War Memorial on that summer day.

##### What is Skateboarding Anyway?

1. When did skateboarding start up?
2. Where did the idea come from?

##### Who Skateboards?

1. What is the average age group of skateboarders?
2. Why do you think fewer girls than boys skateboard?
3. What sort of clothing is worn for skating?

##### Where to Skateboard?

1. What does a skateboard park need?

##### Where Not to Skate

1. Where can kids skate in downtown St. John's?
2. Where is it banned?

##### Why the Bad Rap?

1. Why do the war veterans not want people hanging around the War Memorial?

##### What's a Kid to Do?

1. Describe what happened in June of 1996.
2. What was the outcome of the demonstration?

##### Where to Skate?

1. Was Feildian Gardens a popular place to skate?
2. Where do young people prefer to skate?

##### Missing the Point

1. Where are there other skateboarding parks in Newfoundland?
2. Do you think skateboarding is regarded as a serious sport by the general public?

##### A Portable Place

1. Describe the portable outdoor park at Memorial Stadium.

## **Taking The Lead**

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2. Does John think it is a good place for skateboarding? Why/why not?

### **The Law on their Side**

1. What was Councillor Miller's stand on the issue?
2. What would he like to see happen?

### **An Uncertain Future**

1. Where in Halifax is the park located?
2. How do you feel about skateboarding downtown?

### **Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story** Michael Jones

#### **Introduction**

This is a long tale, but a good one. It is also an important one in Newfoundland. It is the story of a protest group who came together to oppose the building of a giant garbage incinerator in Long Harbour. Without money a ragged bunch of local residents — Rose Steele of Placentia at the centre of them — did battle against some very rich and powerful companies.

The story seems complicated at times because of the number of different people and organizations that are part of it. So we have prepared this list for you. It helps you figure out who the players are and where they stood on the issue. The list could be a lot longer. It includes only individuals and organizations mentioned in this version of the story.

You don't have to read the list yet. It is here for when you need it.

The question you are probably asking is, does this story have a happy ending? Well, you'll have to read it to find out!

### Cast of Characters

#### A. In favour of the incinerator

**Albright and Wilson Americas**, a large multinational corporation based in the United Kingdom. Its main activity was the manufacture of chemicals. Albright and Wilson was the main force behind the proposal to build an incinerator on the site of the old Electric Reduction Company of Canada (ERCO) phosphorus plant at Long Harbour, Newfoundland. Albright and Wilson owned ERCO.

**North American Resource Recovery (NARR)**, the company that Albright and Wilson helped to create for the purpose of promoting and constructing the incinerator. The directors of NARR were the Albright and Wilson employees who had first come up with the idea.

**Bob Kennedy**, one of the Albright and Wilson employees who had gone to the multinational corporation's senior people in England with the incinerator proposal. Kennedy was born in St. John's but had worked all over North America with Albright and Wilson for 16 years. He and Seattle businessman Dale Huffman put the deal together. Kennedy became NARR's spokesman and made all announcements about the project.

**Bill Hogan**, Member of the House of Assembly for Placentia and Minister of Municipal Affairs in the Clyde Wells government. Hogan supported the project for the jobs it would bring in his district.

**Gary Keating**, Mayor of Long Harbour, who saw the incinerator as an economic opportunity for his region. NARR kept him well-informed. Keating attended NARR press conferences and usually made himself available for comment.

**Long Harbour-Mount Arlington Heights Town Council**, headed by Keating, eventually came out in full support for the NARR project.

**Long Harbour Development Corporation**, a not-for-profit corporation that promoted economic development in the Long Harbour area, strongly hoped that the incinerator, called a "waste-to-energy" project, would be built.

The **United Steelworkers of America**, Local 2428, and its president **Richard Kelly**.

The **Argentia Area Chamber of Commerce** and its spokesman, **John Maher**.

Various **businesses** in the Placentia-Argentia area wanted to see the project go ahead.

Some **politicians**, such as Premier **Clyde Wells** and Minister of Environment and Lands **Patt Cowan** gave some support to the project. Creating jobs makes governments look good.

**Rex Murphy**, journalist, thought the people of Long Harbour should decide for themselves. He supported the incinerator in that he refused to come out against it.

Quite a few **residents** of the Placentia Area were in favour of the project.

**One out of 10 Newfoundlanders** wanted the incinerator, according to polls.

#### B. Opposed to the incinerator:

**Rose Steele**, mother of three and co-owner with her sister Tina of the Timber Galley Café, Placentia.

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**Bruce Gilbert**, Rose's friend, a community field worker who lost his job when Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) discontinued its Extension Services. He and other field workers then founded the Extension Community Development Co-operative to continue their development work in outport communities.

**Marlene Cashin**, who with her husband, **Don Gladden**, operated a Bed and Breakfast in Placentia.

**SNAGG**, the Say No to American Garbage Group, an organization founded by Rose, Bruce, Marlene, Don, and 30 or so other Placentia-area residents.

Other Members of SNAGG Placentia mentioned in this story: **Dr. John Evans, Rosemary Whelan, Calvin Manning**.

The **Coalition Against Incineration** and its founding member groups:

- SNAGG Placentia
- Extension Community Development Co-op
- Action Environment
- Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Association
- Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Education Association

Spokespersons for the Coalition groups included **Pat Hann** and **Brian White** of the Extension Co-op, **Jim Ross** of Action Environment, **Linda Ross** of the Public Health Association, and **Neil Tilley** of the Adult Education Association

**Tim Angel**, a woodworker in St. John's who heard Bruce Gilbert on the radio and got involved. He became the president of SNAGG St. John's.

**Dr. Linda Whalen** founded the Centre for Longterm Environmental Action in Newfoundland (CLEAN). CLEAN's newsletter was SNAGG's chief means of communicating to its members and to other environmental groups.

The **Placentia Area Cancer Group** and its "parent" organization, the **Placentia Area Health Promotion Association**.

Other organizations, notably **The Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation** and its spokesman, **Rick Bouzane**. The Federation joined the Coalition Against Incineration.

**Municipal councils**, such as the **Whitbourne Town Council** and **Mayor Lloyd Gosse**, and, eventually, the **St. John's City Council**.

The **Progressive Conservative Party** and the **New Democratic Party** in the Newfoundland House of Assembly.

Most newspaper columnists including *Evening Telegram* editor **Bill Callahan** and columnist **Joe Walsh. Ray Guy**, a St. John's journalist originally from Placentia Bay, strongly opposed burning American garbage in Newfoundland.

**International environmentalists**, such as **Rosalie Bertell, Paul Connett**, and **David Suzuki**, opposed incineration on principle.



### **Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story**

#### **PART ONE: The Birth of a Protest Group**

##### **1.1. Placentia, 1991**

In 1991 Rose Steele worked in a little coffee shop in Placentia. She and her sister Tina owned it. It was called the Timber Galley Café.

Rose's friend Bruce Gilbert worked nearby at the Extension Community Development Co-operative. The Co-op had just been started by Bruce and a group of community field workers who had lost their jobs with Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). The group hoped to get contracts that would pay their salaries. So far things were not going well.

In fact, Bruce was making almost no money at all. He knew he had to find a new job, and soon. He had already applied to Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for a grant to study community development in Africa. He was waiting to hear from them.

Bruce spent a fair bit of time at Rose's café in 1991.

Times were not good in Newfoundland that year, particularly in the Placentia region. There were fewer than 200 local people still working at the American Naval Base in Argentia. At its peak of operation it had employed more than 5000 Newfoundlanders. The base would shut down completely in the next few years.

Another blow to the economy was the closing in 1989 of the Electric Reduction Company of Canada (ERCO) phosphorus plant in Long Harbour. The plant was owned by a multinational company called Albright and Wilson Americas. It had employed almost 300 people for more than 20 years.

By 1991 the unemployment rate for the Placentia-Argentia area was more than 50 per cent. There was no question that jobs were needed. So when Albright and Wilson revealed in January of 1991 that they were looking for another business to start up on the ERCO site, many people were happy.

Minister of Mines and Energy Rex Gibbons said he was very pleased that the company had decided to stay in Long Harbour. "Newfoundland has searched the world for businesses for that site and we have had no luck," he said.

Albright and Wilson announced that they were meeting with the Long Harbour Town Council. At the meeting they would discuss the creation of a Development Corporation for the area. Together they would look for federal funding. There was a feeling of optimism in the air again.

In May the federal Minister of Fisheries John Crosbie announced that the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) was giving Albright and Wilson a grant for nearly a million dollars. The money would go to North American Resource Recovery (NARR), a company created by Albright and Wilson. NARR intended to build a large incinerator in Long Harbour, and the ACOA money would be used to study the feasibility of the incinerator idea.

It would be one of the biggest incinerators in the world, NARR said. They called it a "waste-to-energy" project because the heat from the incinerator would be converted into electricity for up to 10,000 homes. The project would create up to 150 permanent jobs operating the facility and 50 more jobs in the transportation sector. There would also be hundreds of people hired to build the incinerator.

People were pleased to hear all this. But it was not the whole story. Cut to Rose's café. It is the day of the announcement by NARR and Crosbie. Bruce Gilbert is sitting with his coffee reading about it in *The Evening Telegram*. He calls out to Rose.

"Listen to this," he says. "ACOA is giving \$937,500 to a company called North American Resource Recovery (NARR) to build a garbage incinerator in Long Harbour. The heat from the incinerator will generate enough electricity for 10,000 homes."

"How much garbage would they have to burn to do that?" asks Rose.

"A lot. More than we have around here."

"Where would they get it?"

"From the United States. From New York."

"What kind of garbage?" Rose asks.

"The company says it will burn only household garbage and that it will burn cleanly."

"Incinerators aren't clean, not the ones I have seen around here," says Rose.

"We should keep an eye on this," says Bruce. He finishes his coffee, stands up and goes back to work.

And that was the beginning of it.

### 1.2. The Talk of the Town

During the summer Rose and Bruce talked a lot about the incinerator project when they met at the Timber Galley Café. Rose also discussed it with her good friends Marlene Cashin and Don Gladden who ran a Bed and Breakfast down the road from the restaurant. Marlene's business was based on tourism. She was nervous about the incinerator.

As part of his work with the Extension Co-op Bruce had helped to create an organization in Placentia called BAY-TV. The BAY-TV group produced programs for the local cable channel. They had already broadcast a number of shows on local issues.

Most of the members of the BAY-TV group saw pollution in the area as a serious issue.

In November they produced a program about the environment. People were invited to phone in — live on the air — with their comments. Most of the talk was about the proposed incinerator project. Most people were not happy that shiploads of garbage would be coming to Newfoundland from the United States.

But not everybody was against the construction of the giant incinerator. Many were in favour of it because of the jobs it would bring. There would be temporary jobs building the facility permanent jobs running it, spin-off jobs in the transportation industry.

The issue became the talk of the town. Rose and Bruce and their friends would go for a beer a few times a week. The incinerator was a big topic of discussion. "There were a few heated discussions at one bar, the Lighthouse in Jersey side," Rose remembers.

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"Most people were worried about pollution," she says, "but many were afraid to speak against the incinerator. They didn't want to rock the boat."

People who lived near the ERCO facility had had first-hand experience with pollution. In 1968 liquids flowing from the plant poisoned the waters around Long Harbour. Great numbers of dead fish — some of which had turned a strange red colour — washed up on beaches. Both the plant and the fishery were closed immediately while an investigation took place.

When vegetation and trees around the ERCO plant died mysteriously<sup>1)</sup>, the Department of Health advised people not to have vegetable gardens or to pick berries within three kilometres of the facility. When the plant closed in 1989 it was estimated that it would take 25 years and more than \$100 million to clean up the mess its owners had left behind.

### **From Newfoundland writer Greg Whelan's history of the ERCO plant:**

*Threats to the environment were apparent almost from the beginning. The Red Herring Scare occurred in December when it was discovered that fish exposed to phosphorous effluent from the plant suffered internal bleeding and were washing up dead throughout Placentia Bay. Other wildlife in the area were affected as well. A moose and two rabbits were found to be deformed due to excess bone fluoride levels. The mysterious death of vegetation within a 3 km radius of the facility prompted the provincial department of health to warn residents not to grow vegetable gardens or pick berries in the region.*

*Measures introduced over the years by ERCO and the subsequent owner Albright and Wilson Americas, reduced the pollution to "acceptable" levels, and the most common concern voiced by Long Harbour residents was a slight annoyance with the yellow dust that continuously covered their homes and cars.*

*Today, the phosphorous plant is gone, and the town and the province must deal with two problems: the loss of nearly 300 jobs, and what to do with the contaminated areas left behind.*

*These two questions are closely interrelated, since recovering some of the jobs provided by the former plant depends on finding other uses for the degraded site. Indeed, the whole town's future may depend on attracting another economic and social consequences for the community.... Young people must often leave to find work.*

In 1991 there was a belief among the residents of the region that they had a much higher rate of cancer than normal. As a result the Placentia Area Cancer Group had been formed. Bruce Gilbert was a member. He had arranged that blood samples be taken from a group of local residents. The samples had been sent to world-renowned environmental scientist Dr. Rosalie Bertell in Toronto for analysis.

Now Albright and Wilson, under the name of North American Resource Recovery was talking about putting a new industry on the site of the ERCO plant. Were they trying to avoid cleaning up the environmental mess left over from the phosphorus operation? Some people thought so. The company denied it.

But the ERCO plant had employed nearly 300 people. It had been the mainstay of the area's economy. And the new project would employ hundreds more. Nobody could argue with these facts.

In late 1991 Bruce Gilbert began to look for information about pollution caused by the burning of waste. His St. John's friends Neil Tilley and Pat Hann, also members of the Extension Development Co-operative, helped with the research.

Incinerators were dirty things, that was what Bruce was discovering. Even with the latest technology they spewed out large quantities of dangerous chemicals. Even the ash that would be left over from the burning of the garbage was considered toxic. "To be truthful," Rose Steele admits today, "I didn't

know much about incinerators or the environment or even the economy of the area, even though I'm from Placentia Bay myself. I had just never paid attention to that stuff."

### 1.3. The Gathering of the Clan

**Dr. Rosalie Burtell left this message on Bruce Gilbert's message machine:**

*"All I can tell you quickly over the phone is that 40 per cent of the lymphocytes are clinically low, which says to me it's something airborne which stores in lymph that is causing some problems locally. Anyway if there had been no problem I would have gotten back to you quicker But it's a little deeper because there is a problem. And I'm sorry but I'm going to be out of town a good bit and it's going to have to wait until I get back about November 13th. Thanks."*

In the fall of 1991 more details about the incinerator were released in the media. An article in the *Telegram* reported that another big corporation was getting involved. It was Ogden Martin, a company that managed 21 large incinerators in the United States. They were experts in burning garbage and they employed 40,000 people around the world. Ogden Martin was negotiating with NARR to run the incinerator at Long Harbour.

"It was getting serious," says Rose. "I was imagining the great barges of stinky trash sailing past Placentia Harbour. What tourist would want to come here then? And I was sure no one could control the kind of garbage it would be. Meanwhile Bruce was coming up with all this information about toxic ash. I got very scared."

In early November Bruce heard back from Dr. Rosalie Bertell about the blood samples the Cancer Group had sent to her. Four out of the 10 samples showed abnormalities. "There is a problem," Bertell said. She suggested that there could be something "airborne" that people were inhaling.

Bruce told the other members of the Cancer Group. They knew that it could be important information. But the sample — 10 people — was too small for any definite conclusions to be reached. More tests would have to be done.

Christmas came, with its round of parties.

In early January everyone in the Placentia -Argentia area found a glossy brochure in their mailboxes. It was called, "Energy from Waste Update." It was from North American Resource Recovery. It spoke about the incinerator in a very positive way.

In the middle of the afternoon Bruce went to the Timber Galley Café with the pamphlet. "Look at this," he said, showing it to Rose. "They are calling it clean garbage. They say the incinerator will be *clean, effective, and efficient.*"

"This is getting ridiculous," Rose said. They decided to have a small meeting. They invited Marlene Cashin and Don Gladden and some members of the BAY-TV group to come to the café on Saturday night. There were seven in all. They had one thing in common: they were concerned about the incinerator. They were worried about the damage to the environment and to people's health that burning so much garbage could cause. Even with the jobs, was it worth it?

They felt that a public meeting was needed, as soon as possible.

"What we were thinking," explains Rose, "was that if enough people came to the public meeting who were strongly against the project, we would form a group that would work to stop it. We wondered how many would come, and who. For us this was going to be a very crucial gathering."

Bruce wrote the announcement and brought it to the Cable TV station to be put on the ad channel. Rose put up posters and mentioned the meeting to everybody she met.

### **PUBLIC MEETING**

**To discuss the Environmental Effects of the  
Proposed Incinerator at Long Harbour  
February 16, 1992  
District Vocational School in Placentia, 7:30 PM**

Bruce and Rose and Marlene, the organizers, wanted people on both sides of the issue to show up. Soon the whole town knew about the February 16 meeting. But how many would come?

Three days before the meeting Bruce told Rose some good news: CIDA had awarded him a Development Education grant and he was leaving for Africa in April. Rose was happy to hear it. Then Bruce told her, "If we form a group, you'll probably have to be in charge of it."

Rose felt her stomach drop. "I nearly died when I heard that," Rose says. "I was a good talker all right but I had no experience speaking to groups, especially in public. And this was an important meeting."

Important for all of them, but especially for Rose. Although she didn't know it yet, her life would be changed forever by that public meeting.

### **1.4. The Founding of the Group**

The meeting was on a Sunday night. Gradually people trickled in until finally Rose counted 40 — not a bad showing. The meeting was opened by Pat Hann of Extension Co-op, who had driven from St. John's to be its chairman. He introduced Bruce Gilbert, who gave a summary of the facts. The company, NARR, would be importing more than a million tonnes of garbage from the United States per year. There would be a huge pile of toxic ash left over — about 1,000 tonnes per day! What would they do with it? Ships loaded with garbage would soon be seen in Placentia Bay. What would this do to the tourism industry?

Rose spoke her mind, as did Marlene and several others.

They introduced a special guest from St. John's. He was Dr. John Evans of Memorial University a man who knew a lot about incinerators.

"How much garbage is a million tonnes?" Dr. Evans asked. He explained that it was 10 times the amount produced by the 300,000 people who lived on the Avalon Peninsula. "Garbage trucks carrying what the incinerator burns in one year would be bumper-to-bumper from St. John's to St. Anthony, a distance of 1500 kilometres," he said.

Evans went on to say that the United States had a big garbage problem. They had too much garbage and they needed to get rid of it. They were already shipping toxic waste to other countries, he said. He strongly suggested that there were better ways to spend taxpayers' money than to take on the huge garbage problems of the eastern United States. Everyone applauded.

After all the information was presented Bruce asked people to raise their hands if they were strongly opposed to the incinerator. Thirty-five of 40 did so. "Should we form a group?" Bruce asked.

Everyone agreed that they should. There was a discussion about what sort of group it should be. The five people who had not raised their hands thought that the group should look at both sides of the

issue. They did not want to take a firm stand against the incinerator. They were thinking of jobs. Everyone in the room agreed that the towns of the area needed jobs in the worst possible way.

**Dr. John Evans wrote a letter to the editor of  
The Evening Telegram on March 24, 1991:**

*How much is a tonne of garbage? I didn't know, so I asked the friendly people at Robin Hood Bay dump to help me out. An ordinary city garbage compactor truck carries anywhere from three to 11 tonnes, with an average of about eight. Every winter the cities of St. John's, Mount Pearl, and neighbouring towns bring 300 tonnes of garbage to the dump. During the summer this goes up to about 400 tonnes. Three thousand five hundred tonnes of garbage will fit into 437 compactor trucks. If each is about 25 feet long and if they are lined up bumper to bumper with only a foot between them, then they would stretch about two miles. Over a period of a year more than a million tonnes of garbage will be brought to Newfoundland, a line of garbage trucks stretching from here to St. Anthony.*

*No matter how you slice it, a million tonnes is a lot of garbage to import each year into our clean and green island. And the ash is so rich in toxins that in the United States it is defined as toxic waste. This means that it must be placed in plastic-lined pits and covered by a waterproof cover in order to prevent the heavy metals from leaching out into nearby streams and lakes. This is a very expensive process. What is the law in Newfoundland regarding the disposal of incinerator ash? I suspect that Albright and Wilson want to set up shop in Newfoundland because we have no applicable legislation. If our laws were as strict as American laws it is hard to believe that the incineration business in Long Harbour would be economically feasible.*

But then Bruce stood up. "I know the facts about this incinerator," he said. "It is dangerous, it is unhealthy, it will pollute the whole Avalon Peninsula. The group we form here tonight must strongly oppose the project."

Applause. Almost everybody agreed. The five were in effect voted down. Although it still had no name, the group was formed and its mission was to stop the incinerator.

The first business was the election of officers. Bruce had the gift of the gab, he was experienced, he seemed on the surface to be the leader and natural president of the group. But he had three things against him: he was a full-time activist, he was not from the area, and he was leaving for Africa within two months. Bruce nominated Rose for president.

Rose Steele was a local girl, a small-business owner, the charming and intelligent mother of three young children. She was an ideal choice to be the chairperson for a group that stood against damaging the health of future generations of Newfoundlanders.

Rose was voted in as president. Rosemary Whelan from Branch was elected vice-president and Marlene Cashin became the secretary-treasurer.

"What will we call the group?" Rose asked. She was the chairperson now. Everybody agreed it should be a name that attracted attention. After a discussion a young man named Calvin Manning suggested, "No Thanks to American Garbage" as a name. Bruce liked it but thought they should find a better acronym. "The Say No to American Garbage Group, SNAGG," he said. "How about that?"

SNAGG was born, an organization whose mission was to stop a major industrial development in an area starved for jobs. Rose Steele was its president. A steering committee of twelve was formed. The committee would run the group between meetings and do the lion share of the work.

### 1.5. The Campaign is Launched

News of the creation of SNAGG, the Say No to American Garbage Group, spread throughout the Placentia-Argentia area. Not everyone was pleased.

Within days North American Resource Recovery (NARR), announced that they were creating a special "environmental panel." The panel would hold meetings to find out what the public thought of the incinerator project. Members of the panel, headed by local businessman Stan Tobin, would be paid for their work.

On February 23 the SNAGG steering committee met at Marlene Cashin and Don Gladden's Bed and Breakfast. The first order of business was to write a press release announcing the existence of the group and stating its goals. The group also decided to contact environmental groups in Canada and other countries. These groups could speak up in support of SNAGG, as well as provide information about the dangers of incineration. Everyone felt that research was important. What were the health issues? What were the track records of the companies involved in the project? SNAGG had to know what it was talking about.

Next on the list was the writing of letters to government members and to the editors of newspapers. A large-scale letter-writing campaign was planned.

Other ideas included circulating a petition and holding regular public meetings. Rose thought it would be a good idea to meet with the town councils of the area to gain their support, if possible. Someone suggested holding a benefit concert to raise money for SNAGG's day-to-day operations.

Some of the steering committee members worked with BAY-TV They were urged by the committee to do more programs on the environment, particularly on the effects of large-scale incineration.

Rose asked Bruce if he could get the Placentia Cancer Group to speak out about the incinerator. "I will try" Bruce replied. He knew he could.

Two days later SNAGG sent out its press release. In it the facts about the incinerator were reviewed. It would burn 3500 tonnes of garbage per day. This would create 250,000 tonnes of ash each year, some of it very toxic. Large amounts of heavy metals would blow across the Avalon Peninsula toward the heavily populated areas around St. John's.

"We know that incineration is detrimental to the health of all people of the Avalon Peninsula, if not all of the Atlantic Region," the press release said. "Studies in Europe show that municipal incineration has terrible effects on children and adults alike."

The fact that nearly a million dollars was being provided to NARR by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) was also mentioned. SNAGG made a demand. "If ACOA money is being spent to *support* this project," they said, "then public money must be available for community groups to *oppose* it."

On February 29 *The Evening Telegram* ran a story about SNAGG, reprinting almost everything in the press release.

The following week Bruce Gilbert went on CBC Radio to talk about the new group. In St. John's a young man named Tim Angel heard Bruce on the air. Angel phoned Bruce in Placentia to volunteer for the cause. There was keen interest in St. John's, Angel reported. The thought of airborne toxins from Long Harbour settling over the city had quickly caught people's attention.

## **Taking The Lead**

## **Taking On The Fight**

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SNAGG had gone public. Its members were a handful of determined young women and men. They were enthusiastic and committed to the cause. As you might expect, they had no idea how difficult the struggle would be or how many more friends they would need to get the job done.



### Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story

#### PART ONE: The Birth of a Protest Group

##### Questions for Discussion

###### 1.1. Placentia, 1991

1. Where did Rose work?
2. What was Bruce Gilbert doing in Placentia?
3. Name one place that employed many people in the Placentia region.
4. Who owned the ERCO phosphorus plant?
5. Give one fact that shows that the economy of the region was poor.
6. What did NARR want to build in Long Harbour?
7. Why were some people pleased with this project?
8. What was Bruce going to keep an eye on?

###### 1.2 The Talk of the Town

1. Why was Marlene Cashin nervous about the incinerator?
2. What did BAY-TV do?
3. Which two issues related to the incinerator did people talk about?
4. What were the health concerns of the people?
5. Why were people told not to pick berries close to the ERCO plant?
6. What did Bruce find out about incinerators?

###### 1.3 The Gathering of the Clan

1. What role was Ogden Martin going to play?
2. What did Dr. Rosalie Bertell tell Bruce?
3. Why did Bruce and Rose want to have a small meeting at the café?
4. What good news did Bruce tell Rose?
5. Why did Rose feel afraid after hearing Bruce's news?

###### 1.4 The Founding of the Group

1. Who chaired the public meeting on a Sunday night in February?
2. Dr. John Evans was an important guest at the meeting. Why?
3. What kind of group did Bruce think the people at the meeting should form?
4. Why did Rose and not Bruce become president?
5. What was the full name of the organization they formed?
6. SNAGG is an acronym. Give an example of another acronym from this story.

###### 1.5 The Campaign is Launched

1. What was the reaction from NARR to the formation of SNAGG?
2. What were three things that SNAGG planned to do?
3. What was SNAGG's position on the use of public money?
4. How did Tim Angel get involved with the new protest group?
5. What do you think is a powerful way of protesting an issue?

### **Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story**

#### **PART TWO: SNAGG Gets Its Sea Legs**

##### **2.1. Into the Fray**

SNAGG's press release had done its job. The media had responded. Rose Steele, Bruce Gilbert, and Marlene Cashin began to give interviews. They communicated a sense of outrage and urgency.

The incinerator project had, of course, already been in the news. The company, North American Resource Recovery (NARR) had made a series of announcements during 1990 and 1991. But now, with SNAGG in existence, there were two sides to the story.

Two sides to the story: this is something the media, especially television, loves. In the spring and summer of 1992 newspapers and television stations presented a series of reports which showed one side of the issue pitted against the other.

Face and eyes into it, Rose was excited and happy. "We really went into action," she says. "We were a very committed group of people. We were plotting and planning almost all day every day. Unfortunately, my kids were seeing a lot less of me."

Not everyone in the Placentia-Argentia area was so excited about SNAGG, however. The Long Harbour Development Corporation, some Town Councils, and a number of business firms were uneasy, even angry. They saw the incinerator project as an opportunity for employment, and many people in the community agreed. SNAGG seemed to be biting the hand that fed them.

Some of Rose's regular customers stopped coming to the Timber Galley Café. Rose and Tina suddenly found it more difficult to get supplies from certain businesses.

On March 11, Rose, Marlene, and Bruce met with the Long Harbour Town Council. Years later Bruce remembers the meeting. "There were a lot of angry faces around the table. Voices were raised. We got a tongue-lashing. But I didn't blame them. They were doing what they thought best for their town at that time."

"You are working against the best interests of the Placentia-Argentia region," Long Harbour Mayor Gary Keating told them.

"We were quite shaken by their reaction," says Rose. "We had not realized how much we were rocking the boat. But we couldn't give up. We knew that the incinerator was wrong, no matter how many jobs it might bring."

That week in March CBC-TV came to the Placentia area. SNAGG members were interviewed. So was Gary Keating.

On Tuesday, March 17, a full documentary report was aired on CBC. "The controversy over the incinerator is just beginning," said reporter Rick Seaward. He described the coming debate as "a battle for the hearts and minds of Newfoundlanders."

Rose Steel was interviewed at a SNAGG meeting. "There is no way we are letting this project happen. We do not need an incinerator in Long Harbour and we're not having one," she said. She seemed very sure of herself.

As expected, the Long Harbour Mayor supported the incinerator. His town needed the jobs, he said. But he admitted that he was worried that if the incinerator were built, the cleanup of the old ERCO plant might be ignored.

**What Marlene Cashin said on CBC-TV,  
March 17, 1991:**

*The government has put a lot of money into tourism here. You have Cape St. Mary's at the top of the bay and now they are going to put a huge garbage incinerator at the bottom. There are going to be garbage barges in the bay and clouds of smoke coming over the hills where we watch ospreys every morning. I'm really concerned. I don't know if we can make a living running a bed and breakfast if this goes ahead. This is a fight that Long Harbour is not going to be able to take on by itself. We're faced with the prospect of John Crosbie giving a million dollars from ACOA to that company. They are looking at major unemployment down there and they're thinking 'We may never get anything else for our town again.' So this might not be a fight that Long Harbour can even take on. Just because they are not coming out to meetings right now doesn't necessarily mean that they are in favour of this project down there. We have heard a lot underground, but people are afraid to stand up and say anything. So this might be one fight that is just going to have to be taken right out of Long Harbour, right out of the Placentia area, and put into a bigger place.*

Seaward asked Marlene Cashin about the lack of support for SNAGG in the local area, especially in Long Harbour.

Marlene's reply was clear: "They are looking at major unemployment down there.... Just because they are not coming out to meetings right now doesn't necessarily mean that they are in favour of this project. People are afraid to stand up and say anything. This might be one fight that is going to have to be taken right out of Long Harbour, right out of the Placentia area, and put into a bigger place."

Marlene had revealed something that had been on SNAGG's mind for weeks: the incinerator issue was too big and too important to be handled by a local protest group.

In fact when the CBC report was on the air on St. Patrick's Day, Marlene, Bruce, and Rose were already in St. John's. They were meeting that night with Jim Ross, president of an organization called Action Environment. The next day they went to the Extension Community Development Co-op to meet Pat Hann and Neil Tilley.

SNAGG was hatching a new and bigger plan. And Rose Steele was getting a feel for St. John's.

## 2.2. This Issue Has Two Sides

The CBC -TV documentary had thrown fuel on the fire. By the end of March the incinerator project was a hot topic in Newfoundland.

In a television interview on March 19, Premier Clyde Wells admitted that he would support the incinerator if it were proven to be environmentally safe.

*Evening Telegram* columnist Joe Walsh said of the Premier's position, "That's like saying you would agree with dropping a bomb as long as it doesn't explode."

In the third week of March the company, North American Resource Recovery, met with the Long Harbour Town Council. Some of the town councillors were worried about the incinerator's effect on people's health. They had perhaps heard some of the things SNAGG had been saying.

NARR's project manager and spokesman Bob Kennedy calmed them down. Kennedy called the incinerator a "resource recovery" project. Electricity would be produced from the burning of the garbage. The Americans were not "dumping" garbage in Newfoundland, not at all, he stated. In fact NARR would have to work hard to find a long-term supply of municipal waste to be used as a "fuel source." Lots of other companies wanted that garbage, too, Kennedy said.

He added that there would be no garbage barges in Placentia Bay. The garbage would be shipped in 40-foot containers that would be stored at the site until needed. They would be emptied in a closed area and would not cause pollution.

What about the tons of toxic ash left over after each day's burning? Well, Kennedy said, there are two types of ash produced, *bottom* ash and *fly* ash. Bottom ash is not toxic and would be landfilled. Or, he hinted, "markets for it may be developed."

**Bruce Gilbert wrote the press release for the Placentia Area Health Promotion Association. He listed the toxic materials that are produced from burning garbage in a giant incinerator.**

- **Hydrogen chloride**, an acid gas affecting people within a 50-km radius. The Long Harbour incinerator could produce more than 468 tonnes per year.
- **Particulates**, small airborne particles which have been linked to increases in respiratory allergies. Long Harbour could produce up to 200 tonnes of particulates per year
- **Mercury**, which can form deposits in the brain, liver, and kidney tissue and has been linked to tumours, kidney failure, loss of memory, and speech disorders. Long Harbour could put five tonnes of mercury into the air per year
- **Lead**, which has been linked to brain damage in children, sterility, abortion, and fetal damage.
- **Cadmium**, which in high concentrations can cause lung tissue damage leading to emphysema, loss of smell, and anemia.
- **Heavy metals** which are caught by smokestack filtering systems, must be disposed of as toxic ash. Long Harbour could produce as much as 330,000 tonnes of ash each year.

Fly ash (caught in the smokestack by the scrubbers) would contain toxins, he admitted. But it would be "treated" and then "landfilled in a special area."

What about the emissions from the smokestacks? These, Kennedy insisted, would be "carefully monitored and well within established standards."

The councillors were happy to be told these things. On TV Mayor Gary Keating hoped that the project could be ready for registration with the provincial government by April. An Environmental Impact Study would then take place, Keating said, and then the truth would be known.

A week later the Placentia Area Health Promotion Association announced its strong opposition to the incinerator. The Association said that they did not believe anyone could control what arrives by sea to be burned in the plant. Nor did they trust the company to give "balanced and accurate information" about the project, they said.

**Whitbourne Mayor Lloyd Gosse  
explains his opposition to the incinerator proposal:**

*I was a dangerous goods inspector for the federal government for four years, and one of our major concerns was the illegal transportation of hazardous materials which the Americans want to get rid of. They don't care, they pay big bucks to get this stuff across the border. Why are they coming all the way up here to get rid of it? If that's all we can do here to create a few jobs it's not even worth talking about.*

The Association's press release listed the toxic emissions that are produced by incineration. It was not a pretty picture.

Lead, they pointed out, has been connected with brain damage in children. Cadmium can cause lung tissue damage. Studies show that heavy metals in the toxic ash are associated with rare deformities in children if the parents live downwind of incinerators. There would be tonnes of these toxins thrown into the air by the incinerator each year.

Bruce Gilbert had written the press release, and the *Telegram* had printed it all.

At his desk in St. John's on March 24 the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Bill Hogan, read the article in the *Telegram*. Hogan was the member of the House of Assembly (MHA) for Placentia. He supported the NARR proposal for the jobs it would bring to his district. He wondered how the Health Promotion Association had suddenly become so radical. Bad publicity about the incinerator was not good for business.

### **Excerpt from Ronald Keating's March 28 Letter to the Editor:**

*The comment was also made that the people of Long Harbour couldn't be trusted to be objective because all they cared about was jobs. Well the difference between us and you (SNAGG) is that we are willing to look at all the information, both for and against, before making up our minds, and until such a time we will fight our own battles, thank you.*

While Bill Hogan read the *Telegram* and thought about it all, Rose and Bruce were meeting with the Placentia Town Council. The Council listened carefully but took no firm position. The councillors knew that to come out against the incinerator was politically unwise.

A few days later Whitbourne Mayor Lloyd Gosse announced that his town council was "strongly opposed" to the incinerator development.

On March 28 the *Telegram* printed a letter from Ronald Keating, Jr., of Long Harbour. Keating pointed to "factual errors and sometimes distortion of facts" in a March 24 letter to the editor written by SNAGG member Dr. John Evans of Placentia. Obviously Evans did not attend the NARR public information sessions, Keating said.

Keating had also watched the March 17 CBC-TV documentary and had heard the interview with Marlene Cashin. Cashin's comments had annoyed him.

The incinerator debate had two sides. Both were passionate. It had become an "us and them" affair.

### **2.3. SNAGG Comes to St. John's: The Coalition**

On Friday, April 3, Bruce, Rose, and Marlene drove to St. John for a second meeting with Pat Hann and Neil Tilley at the Extension Community Development Co-op. Again Jim Ross of Action Environment attended. That night they decided to form an alliance of organizations to fight the Long Harbour proposal.

They called it the "Coalition Against Incineration." They introduced themselves to the public exactly one week later, on Friday, April 10, 1992.

The Coalition Against Incineration did not just put out a press *release*, it called a press *conference*. The incinerator issue was now that important.

Sitting at the front table, facing a half dozen reporters, were Rose Steele and Marlene Cashin of SNAGG Placentia, Brian White of the Extension Community Development Co-op, Jim Ross of Action Environment, Linda Ross of the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Association, and Neil Tilley of the Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Education Association.

### **Metals found in Placentia blood samples**

Bruce Gilbert, a member of the Placentia-area Cancer Group, says a Toronto doctor has found, through preliminary findings, that high levels of heavy metals exist in blood samples of some residents.

The group approached Dr. Rosalie Burtell of the International Institute for Health and Concern in Toronto to examine blood samples taken from ten people in the Placentia area.

Mr. Gilbert said Dr. Burtell is helping them "track down what might be hypothetical causes of what has been perceived locally as being a cancer rate that is out of control in the Placentia area."

Dr. Burtell's preliminary findings indicated there was "something airborne in the area," he said.

"When I asked her further about that she said that it sounds like there is something airborne in the area that probably deals with heavy metal."

"It is no accident that I'm involved and interested in this issue, because the heavy metals might have been from ERCO (former phosphorus plant at Long Harbour) or who knows."

Mr. Gilbert, who is opposed to a proposal by North American Resource Recovery to establish a garbage incinerator at Long Harbour, said the ten people who volunteered blood samples over a year ago agreed to provide more samples for Dr. Burtell to re-evaluate.

Dr. Burtell could not be reached for comment.

*The Evening Telegram, April 13, 1992.*

Bruce Gilbert might have sat at the table as the delegate from the Placentia Area Health Promotion Association, but he didn't dare. The MHA for Placentia was not happy with the position the Association had taken. He had even called some members of the Cancer Group. He had discovered that Bruce had written the Association's press release and he suspected that Bruce had sent the statement to the *Telegram* without circulating it to all members of the Association. There was some truth in that.

So Bruce stayed in the audience. "I was a floater," he says. "And anyway, I was about to go to Africa."

Just before the press conference started, Bruce remembered to call Tim Angel. Tim left his house right away. He arrived 20 minutes later.

Rose Steele spoke as the mother of three children. "I am not about to sit idly by while this company pollutes the water and air that my children have to drink and breathe."

Marlene Cashin, thinking of what Ronald Keating wrote in his letter to the editor, said: "We *do* want people to hear both sides of the argument, then make an informed decision. We are sure that when all the information is on the table, people will agree with our position."

Linda Ross spoke about the heavy metals that will be spread across the Avalon Peninsula. She mentioned the danger of landfills. After 25 years landfills leak, releasing poison into soil and rivers, she said.

After the coalition members spoke, there were questions from reporters. The press conference was nearly over. Rose Steele got ready to thank everyone for coming. But there was one more comment, from Bruce Gilbert, a man in the audience.

Bruce announced that he was a member of the Placentia Area Cancer Group. The group was trying to "trace down what might be the causes of what has been seen locally as a high cancer rate that is out of control in the Placentia area," he said.

The reporters listened carefully as Bruce told them about Dr. Rosalie Bertell and the blood samples. "Dr. Bertell has informed me that there is a problem with lymphocyte levels in four of the ten samples. It could be caused by something airborne," said Bruce. He hinted that the ERCO plant could be the cause of possible health problems in the area. Residents had been breathing its fumes for 21 years.

The press conference ended. Tim Angel came up to Rose Steele and introduced himself. "We took an instant liking to each other," Rose says. On Sunday Bruce was on a plane heading for Johannesburg, South Africa. During the week the newspapers and TV stations had stories about the Coalition Against Incineration. In a separate, smaller article the *Telegram* reported what Bruce Gilbert had said at the end of the press conference. The headline reads, "Metals found in Placentia blood samples."

Bill Hogan read the story in the paper. He was not pleased. He made a number of calls and then he wrote a letter to the editor.

**Minister of Municipal Affairs and MHA for Placentia Bill Hogan was not happy to hear about the abnormal blood samples taken from residents of his district. Here is an excerpt from his Letter to the Editor:**

*I would like to refer you, your readers, and in particular the residents of the Placentia area to a so-called story printed in your edition of Monday, April 13, 1992, entitled, "Metals found in Placentia blood samples." It would cause unnecessary alarm and fears among the residents I represent. Such statements are typical of irrational and unfounded statements originating in my district for some time now, related to health and environment issues. I have remained silent because everybody should be permitted to speak out, credible or not, whatever the source, whenever they wish — but this latest is so irresponsible and so blatantly misleading that I must expose it...I have made a complaint to the local police requesting that this matter be investigated as harmful public mischief and I have asked the senior officials of the Department of Health to conduct an official investigation into the matter.*

### 2.4. The Angry MHA

MHA for Placentia Bill Hogan's letter appeared in *The Evening Telegram* on April 20. Mr. Hogan was in a fighting mood. First he called Bruce Gilbert's statements in the *Telegram* "irrational and unfounded." He feared that they "could cause unnecessary alarm and fears" in his district.

Hogan revealed that he had made a complaint to the police. He wanted Bruce's comments investigated as "public mischief." He believed that Gilbert had spoken out without permission from either Dr. Rosalie Bertell or the Placentia Cancer Group. He called upon the Department of Health to investigate.

But he went further than that. The Minister's letter advised the people in his district to look closely at the "Johnny-Come-Lately groups" who were against the incinerator. The "crowd from outside never did us any favours before," he wrote. "Why should they be giving us their wisdom and kindness now?"

Hogan then accused his "media friends" at CBC and the *Telegram* of listening to "freakish malcontents who do not have any credible background on the issues...."

It was a strong statement, perhaps too strong. Rose Steele, remembering the letter, says, "Bill put his foot in his mouth. The irony is, if he hadn't mentioned the matter, it might have gone away. Bruce, after all, was in Africa."

Reaction to the letter was swift. Not many people outside the Placentia-Argentia-Long Harbour area agreed with Hogan's views. Many were offended at the words he had used. And of course his criticism of the media did not go down well with the media.

In a letter to the editor, Pat Hann of Extension Co-op called Hogan "a Southern Sheriff in a grade B movie trying to control everything that happens in his territory." Hogan's remarks "are those of a bully," said Hann. He added, "Groups and individuals (both in the Placentia area and outside) are acting with conviction and integrity. You don't have to have a PhD to dislike garbage."

*Evening Telegram* editor Bill Callahan joined in. In a column with the headline, "Hogan plays the hero" he called the Minister's letter "bombast."

Callahan wrote, "The MI-IA for Placentia has given the matter more visibility rather than less." Then he asked some important questions:

- Is there, in fact, a special situation with regard to cancer in the Placentia area?
- Can the cause be traced and/or isolated?
- Is the Department of Health aware of Dr. Bertell's findings?
- If so, is it doing anything about them?
- If not, will it?

### **From Bill Callahan's May 28, 1992, newspaper column, "The Way We Are":**

*If Municipal Affairs Minister Bill Hogan was concerned, as I do not doubt, that public discussion of an alleged abnormal incidence of cancer in the Placentia area might raise unnecessary worry and apprehension, then he certainly went the wrong way to counter it.*

*About all the MHA for Placentia succeeded in doing, other than causing a great deal of confusion, was to give the matter more visibility rather than less. That hardly makes Mr. Hogan a hero!*

*There is no evidence at all that a public panic was caused when The Telegram published a rather innocuous side item arising from a press conference by organizations against the proposed incinerator to burn imported U.S. garbage at Long Harbour. It simply reported the disclosure by Bruce Gilbert, a member of the Placentia Area Cancer Group, that a Toronto researcher, Dr. Rosalie Burtell, had made a "preliminary" identification of what appear to be high levels of heavy metals in blood samples from residents there.*

*...Leaving aside Mr. Hogan's bombast, important public questions arise: Is there, in fact, a special situation with regard to cancer in the Placentia area? Can the cause be traced and/or isolated? Is the Department of Health aware of Dr. Bertell's findings? If so, is it doing anything about them? If not, will it?*

Meanwhile NARR had issued several press releases. Spokesman Bob Kennedy tried to calm the public: "Air emissions from the incinerator will meet Canadian, US, Newfoundland, and European standards. Municipal waste is a type of fuel just like oil, natural gas, or coal. It is a clean and safe way to generate electricity."



Then Long Harbour Mayor Gary Keating announced that he and eight other local residents would be going to the United States on May 3. Their trip would be paid for by NARR. The purpose of the trip would be to have a first-hand look at American waste-to-energy plants like the one NARR wanted to build in Long Harbour.

Some people suggested that the NARR would show the travellers what it wanted them to see. Keating insisted that the company would not tell the delegation what plants to visit. "We will decide that," he said

The *Telegram* contacted Dr. Rosalie Bertell in May. Luckily for Bruce and for SNAGG she said nothing to contradict what Bruce had said at the Coalition press conference. Bertell was still concerned that four of the ten Placentia - area blood samples had low lymphocyte counts.

"If these ten people are representative of the area," she said, "then you have a problem on your hands. You have to sort it out and you cannot just ignore it." The cause of the abnormalities, she repeated, was probably something in the air that people were breathing.

So Bruce had not been wrong. But he had stirred up a hornet's nest. The Department of Health began the investigation that the MHA for Placentia Bill Hogan had demanded.

### 2.5. Difficult Days for SNAGG

In the spring of 1992, every organization (and many individuals) with any interest in the incinerator took a position for or against it. Both sides of the issue did their best to rally support.

In late April the town councils in the Placentia area decided to "reserve judgement" on the incinerator. Placentia mayor Felix Collins spoke for the joint mayors' committee (representing the mayors of Placentia, Dunville, Jerseyville and Freshwater).

Collins said: "Although the committee cannot accept the hard line position taken by SNAGG, there is a need for an organization like it to raise vital questions. We have an obligation to listen to all the arguments."

On the morning of May 3 the Long Harbour delegation left on its trip to the United States to inspect incinerators.

That night the Coalition Against Incineration (SNAGG included) held a public meeting in St. John's. A large and angry crowd showed up. Clearly the issue was of growing concern to the Newfoundland public.

Rick Bouzane of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation attended. The province's sportsmen were "tremendously concerned" about the impact of the incinerator, Bouzane said. The Wildlife Federation joined the Coalition.

Rose and Tim both spoke passionately. Rose stated the basic SNAGG position: "We have to just say no now. For us it is a very emotional issue. You don't have to be a scientist to be against this project."

NARR held another press conference on May 6. The company confirmed that it was "very close" to registering its project with the Minister of Environment and Lands, Patt Cowan. By law an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) would have to be done as soon as the project was registered.

Gary Keating attended the NARR press conference. Talking of the EIS Keating said, "The experts will tell us what's good and what's bad." He then took the opportunity to mention "the propaganda and misconception" being spread by SNAGG.

### **From John Maher's Letter to the Editor, May 8, 1992:**

We must react to those who portray the handling of "American garbage" as undignified. American garbage is certainly no different from our own. We have hundreds of Newfoundlanders handling garbage on a daily basis and we see nothing undignified about anyone working in the sanitation field.

Compare a person working in a modern incineration facility to that of an unemployed person unable to provide for his or her family. We ask you: where lies the indignity?

We don't have a flood of investors coming into our province to create employment. When a proposal of this magnitude presents itself it should be given every opportunity to prove its viability before being condemned.

In the House of Assembly that same day, Premier Clyde Wells spoke of the sad economic situation in Long Harbour since the ERCO plant closed. He suggested that the incinerator project could change things for the better.

"We didn't want our Premier saying that," says Rose. "We wanted him to oppose the project, to not even consider it. It worried us that he wouldn't take a stand against it."

On Thursday, May 8, representatives of ten of the 14 towns in Conception Bay North declared that they had agreed to "keep an open mind" on the NARR proposal. Their intention was to ask Minister of the Environment Patt Cowan for the facts on the environmental aspects of the project. "Information is what we lack," they said.

The next day the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland announced that they had formed a committee to hold public hearings on the incinerator issue. They had not yet decided on an official party position.

The Argentia Chamber of Commerce then revealed that they had also created a panel to monitor the project. In a letter to the editor, the Chamber's president John Maher admitted that there were "legitimate environmental and health concerns," but warned against condemning the incinerator project before it had a chance to prove itself.

On May 13 the Long Harbour and Mount Arlington Heights Town Council formally announced its support for the project. Its position was based on the findings of the delegation who had visited incineration sites in the United States the week before.

On May 14 United Steelworkers of America, Local 7428, strongly endorsed the construction of the incinerator. Union members were already working on the ERCO site. Union president Richard Kelly and vice-president William Vaters had been on the inspection trip taken by the Long Harbour delegation. They had visited three American cities and they were impressed. The project "would be safe for the employees, the community and the environment," Kelly said.

Meanwhile SNAGG had another public meeting to recruit members. Almost no new people showed up. Rose and Marlene were very disappointed. They felt they were losing ground in Placentia.

For a few weeks in May it seemed as if SNAGG's message was not having much effect. But that was not the whole story.

A certain person had attended the May 3 meeting of the Coalition Against Incineration. Her name was Linda Whalen. She did not speak at the meeting. She did not stay around after it to meet the SNAGG people. But she left a message that she wanted to work with them and that she would contact them later.

No one knew it at the time, but Linda Whalen was to play a major role in the struggle to stop the incinerator.

**Rose was happy to hear Dr. Paul Connett say these things about the proposed incinerator in an interview on CBC-TV:**

*I'm absolutely appalled. I think it is a bad idea for Newfoundland, a bad idea for Long Harbour, and a bad idea for planet earth. I think New York City should be doing something more positive with its trash rather than exporting its problems to somewhere else. And I think that if this is seen as economic development then people are in for a terrible shock.*

*Organized crime is very much involved in waste management throughout New York, New Jersey, and the north-eastern States and of course smuggling hazardous waste into trash is a much cheaper way of getting rid of it. But even if they didn't do that there's enough toxic material in 3500 tonnes of trash that when you burn it you create a lot of problems for the local environment. You can't destroy heavy metals, cadmium, lead, mercury. The better you get at capturing them the worse the ash becomes.*

*This is the end of the road. It's the back end approach. Our task on a finite planet is how we unmake waste. Incineration goes in the wrong direction. it is the dead end for the throwaway society. We've seen over 163 of these projects defeated or put on hold in the United States over the past seven years. California wanted to build 35, they only got three. New Jersey wanted 22, they only ended up with four or five. They can't build them in the United States.*

*And if nobody wants these facilities you can imagine the image that you are going to get in Newfoundland if you do build them. You are going to be perceived as the province that took the dump that nobody else wanted, the patsy community for New York City. If it was a good idea there would be competition for this facility. Show me the competition. Show me the other provinces, the other cities in either Canada or the United States that are lining up to get this wonderful project if you turn it down.*

### 2.6. The Tide Turns

The very thought of importing waste to Newfoundland enraged Linda Whalen. "I was so happy to see such strong opposition to it at that meeting," she says. "I left right after, it was much too crowded for me. But I asked my son Jon to let Rose and Tim know that I wanted to get involved."

"Looking back on it all now, this was the turning point," says Rose. "A week later Tim and I were sitting in Linda's kitchen. She was educated — she even had a PhD — and she was well spoken. Even better, she had ideas for things that could be done. And she had tremendous energy"

Rose told her sister Tina she couldn't put in so many hours at the Timber Galley Café. She started to take the bus to St. John's every week, to meet with Linda and Tim.

They worked out of Linda's house. They called it "the bunker." It was the only office they would ever have. SNAGG, says Linda, was "strictly a kitchen table operation."

From that kitchen table they fought against the highly paid advertising agencies and the smooth-talking public relations experts that NARR hired.

"They were using up the ACOA money and we had nothing," says Rose.

Money or not, Rose, Tim, and Linda decided that there should be something in the news about the incinerator every day. In the spring of 1992 they came close to doing exactly that.

## Taking The Lead

## Taking On The Fight

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By the end of May there was heavy coverage in the media about the incinerator proposal. CBC's nationally broadcast *Midday* program interviewed NARR's Bob Kennedy and the Coalition's Linda Ross at the same time. Bob was slick and well prepared. Because of the interviewer's chummy relationship with Kennedy, Linda's position seemed weak.

As usual, the TV people were trying to be fair. They were presenting both sides of the issue. In this case the smooth-talking front man for NARR won the day.

But local coverage of the issue seemed weighted against the project. World-famous incineration expert Dr. Paul Connett was interviewed on CBC-TV. He condemned the very idea of building the incinerator. "I think it is a bad idea for planet earth," he said.

The Americans themselves had stopped building incinerators, said Connett. "Incineration goes in the wrong direction. It is the dead-end for the throw-away society."

Connett's opinions mirrored the SNAGG position almost exactly. His remarks made many people see the situation clearly for the first time.

Rose Steele remembers watching Dr. Connett on TV. "He was saying exactly what we had been saying. I was so happy that people were getting to hear someone so famous say those things. At that moment I felt like the tide had begun to turn," says Rose.

Others opposed to the incinerator were speaking up, too. Environmentalist teachers Monty Smith and Jerry Kirby had begun to inform their students in St. John's and Mount Pearl about the dangers of incineration. In May those students began circulating a petition. By the fall they would collect 14,000 signatures of people opposed to the incinerator.

On May 20 Rose Steele attended a meeting in St. John's to officially form a St. John's branch of SNAGG. Tim Angel became its president.

Things began to happen fast.

### Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story

### PART TWO: SNAGG Gets Its Sea Legs

#### Questions for Discussion

##### 2.1 Into the Fray

1. What did people in the area know about the incinerator before SNAGG was formed?
2. Why were some people in the Placentia-Argentia area against SNAGG?
3. What was Mayor Keating's main concern?
4. How did Rose Steele show her confidence on TV?
5. How did Marlene Cashin explain the fact that not many people in Long Harbour were speaking out against the incinerator?
6. Why did Marlene and Rose go to St. John's?

##### 2.2 This Issue Has Two Sides

1. What was the effect of the CBC documentary on the incinerator proposal?
2. What was Bob Kennedy's role?
3. How did Kennedy calm down the town councillors?
4. Why did Gary Keating want NARR to register the project with the government?
5. What was the main idea in Bruce Gilbert's press release?
6. What did Lloyd Gosse say about some American attitudes to toxic waste?
7. How did Ronald Keating's letter to the editor show an "us and them" attitude?

##### 2.3 SNAGG Comes to St. John's: The Coalition

1. What was the name of the new alliance against the incinerator?
2. What is the difference between a press release and a press conference?
3. Why didn't Bruce sit at the head table at the press conference?
4. Why did Tim Angel arrive late?
5. How long had the ERCO phosphorus plant been open?
6. Why do you think Bill Hogan made a number of calls?

##### 2.4 The Angry MHA

1. What district did Bill Hogan represent in the House of Assembly?
2. What was Hogan's reason for calling Bruce's statements "irrational and unfounded"?
3. Do you think that the Minister of Municipal Affairs went too far in his letter to the editor? Why or why not?
4. What important concern did the editor of the Telegram, Bill Callahan, have?
5. Why were some people doubtful about the trip to the United States?
6. Did Rosalie Bertell think the low lymphocyte counts were important?

##### 2.5 Difficult Days for SNAGG

1. What was the attitude of Felix Collins towards SNAGG?
2. How do you know that the incinerator issue was becoming important to many people?
3. Who joined the Coalition Against Incineration at the May 3 meeting?
4. What did Rose Steele want Premier Wells to do?
5. Why were these difficult days for SNAGG?

### 2.6. The Tide Turns

1. What was the turning point for Rose in the struggle?
2. Why did Bob Kennedy seem to win the argument with Linda Ross?
3. What point did Dr. Paul Connett make against incineration?
4. Why was Rose so happy to hear what Connett had to say?
5. Who became the president of SNAGG St. John's?

### **Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story**

#### **PART THREE: The Battle for Hearts and Minds**

##### **3.1. Shots from the Bunker**

By early June, 1992, Rose was at Linda Whalen's house four days a week. She spent the weekends with her children in Placentia and she continued to work at the Timber Galley Café. But even at work she was often on the phone doing SNAGG business, and her sister was getting tired of it.

Sitting in the Whalen kitchen, Rose, Tim, and Linda plotted and planned. They wrote letters, they issued press releases, they did research. They found a wealth of data about incineration. They printed information sheets and distributed them around the city.

Linda founded a new organization, the Centre for Long-term Environmental Action in Newfoundland, or CLEAN. Her first task was to publish a newsletter informing people about environmental issues.

Volunteers began to appear on SNAGG's doorstep. Most of them had attended one of the public meetings. They were people of all ages, all social levels, all levels of education. Some were skilled in public speaking. Some were able to do research, and most could write letters. Working groups were formed. A letter-writing campaign blossomed. Soon the members of the government were bombarded with information about the dangers of incineration.

The volunteers went door to door with pamphlets. They were almost always well received. Linda Whalen: "We did it as a consciousness-raising thing, but we found that people were already in tune with our message. Some people even gave us money though we never asked for it."

The companies involved in promoting the incinerator began to call SNAGG. "They tried to sweet-talk us," says Linda. "They would say, 'You have it wrong, this is a recycling project, a resource recovery project.' They wanted us to take the emotion out of our argument, to keep the discussion to the technical side of things. But we needed that emotion. They could bamboozle, they could manipulate with their paid staffs and slick campaigns. We needed the emotional argument: just say no to all this disgusting garbage!"

SNAGG members attended conferences in Newfoundland and on the mainland. "NARR was there and so we had to be," Rose says. "They liked to call our position a 'knee-jerk reaction.' We would tell them they had to pay attention to the way people felt about their plan."

Meanwhile BAY-TV continued to do live phone-in programs in the Placentia area. Tim, Rose, and Marlene were guests on those shows.

In June journalists Rex Murphy and Ray Guy, both originally from Placentia Bay, squared off on CBC-TV. Rex made fun of environmentalists. "They are springing up like weeds," he said. He called them "T-shirt and bumper-sticker protesters."

Murphy felt that only the people of the Long Harbour area should have a say about the incinerator. It's nobody's business but theirs, he suggested.

Ray Guy responded with vigour.

"I'll go along with that, yes, if those gung-ho 'garbologists' in Long Harbour can guarantee the rest of us that they are going to keep all this crap inside their own fence. Do you want to bet on that? Does Rex Murphy want to bet on that?"

Guy concluded by saying, "The answer from here is still no. No, and again no, and yet again - no!"

### 3.2. Political Developments

Premier Clyde Wells and his government continued to sit on the fence. Wells wanted to be fair. He did not want to reject the proposal without giving it a hearing. There should be an environmental impact study first, he said.

#### **On CBC-TV Ray Guy talked about the abandoned ERCO site and the plan to put a giant incinerator there:**

*Could they keep the mess to themselves then? And how are they going to get all this wonderful stuff to Long Harbour without dragging it across the (rand Banks and halfway across Placentia Bay? And when the smoke starts pouring up the stacks, how are they going to keep that in their own back yard? Any guarantees? Want to bet that on a southwest breeze it won't waft up delicate nostrils in Harbour Grace and St. John's and all points between? And those terrific mountains of slag and ash, are they going to store all that in their own back yard, too? Perhaps in butter boxes under their beds? Any guarantees there? The answer from here is still no. No, and again no, and yet again — no!*

The Progressive Conservative Party however, announced its firm opposition to the project. In the legislature the PCs pushed the Government to take a stand on the issue. Party leader Len Simms declared that he had written to John Crosbie requesting that the ACOA funding for the feasibility study be withdrawn.

In June the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation submitted a 23-page brief to all MHAs. It revealed some shocking facts about a New York incinerator the same size as the one proposed for Long Harbour. Even with the latest scrubbing technology tons of heavy metals escape into the air each year, including 126 pounds of arsenic, 10,000 pounds of mercury and 1800 pounds of cadmium.

The Wildlife Federation had been in existence for 30 years. It represented 20 conservation groups with thousands of members. Its thorough research and firm opposition to the incinerator made a strong impression on the public.

During the summer there were hundreds of letters to the editor in a dozen newspapers. Nine out of ten of the writers were against burning imported garbage in Newfoundland.

Newspaper editors and columnists were almost unanimously against the incinerator.

In the month of June the Trinity-Conception Community Futures Board, the Newfoundland Medical Association, the Association of Registered Nurses, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, and former premier Brian Peckford all declared their opposition to the incinerator.

By the middle of June Premier Wells admitted on television that he found the NARR proposal personally offensive. However, Wells still insisted on NARR's right to an environmental assessment. Again he promised that the project would not go ahead if the people of Newfoundland were against it.

Interviewed on TV Pat Hann of the Coalition Against Incineration took some hope from the Premier's comments. Gary Keating and the Long Harbour Development Corporation did not.



*In June New Democratic Party leader Jack Harris teamed up with PC environmental critic Garfield Warren to put forth this motion in the House of Assembly: "Be it resolved that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador immediately reject any industrial development project that involves the importation for disposal of garbage and industrial waste from any jurisdiction outside this province."*

*The Liberals, having a majority in the House, amended the resolution. They added the words, "... if such a project is evaluated and found to be ecologically unsafe, socially unacceptable or contrary to the will of the people of the province."*

*"It was our job," says Rose, "to let them know what the will of the people was. It wasn't easy to convince them that almost nobody wanted this thing."*

In early July Tim Angel chaired a noisy public meeting of the Coalition Against Incineration in St. John's. The meeting was covered by CBC-TV's Rick Seaward.

NARR's Bob Kennedy and Long Harbour mayor Gary Keating had been invited. They sent their regrets. They did not want to attend this sort of meeting before the incinerator project had been registered, they said.

The Minister of Environment, Patt Cowan, had also declined an invitation to the meeting. She was roundly criticized, as was the Wells government.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and MHA for Placentia Bill Hogan, however, did attend. He told the meeting that he was in favour of the incinerator project. He defended the track record of the companies involved, Albright and Wilson and NARR. But he also admitted that environmental concerns had to be considered.

Audience members took Hogan to task for the things he had said in his letter to the editor in April. A politician to the core, Bill took his lumps gracefully.

A week later provincial Department of Health officials announced that they had completed the study that Bill Hogan, worried about the image of his district, had asked for.

A team of doctors had pored over medical records going back 23 years. Although they found that people of the area had 80 per cent more brain cancer, they found no other evidence of abnormal health problems. They dismissed the rumours of a high cancer rate in the Long Harbour area as speculation.

Many thought that the Department had reached these conclusions even before the investigation began.

On TV that evening Gary Keating blamed SNAGG for starting the cancer rumours. Also interviewed, Rose Steele denied it. She was right to do so. The rumours were there long before SNAGG existed.

### 3.3. The Home Stretch

By mid-summer it was clear that SNAGG and the Coalition were winning the propaganda war.

In August came a most encouraging development. Corporate Research Associates of Halifax had conducted a poll for the CBC. The results were that 79 per cent of those polled said they were against building the incinerator. Ten per cent were in favour of it and 11 per cent were undecided.

## Taking The Lead

## Taking On The Fight

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Linda Whalen wrote in the CLEAN newsletter: "Premier Clyde Wells has promised that if the people of Newfoundland do not want this project, it will not go ahead. If this poll does not show enough opposition to the incinerator at Long Harbour, what would?"

Then came another blow for Albright and Wilson. Rabbits snared near the plant were found to have levels of fluoride up to 15 times higher than normal. Fluoride leads to arthritic conditions and rotting of bones.

On the evening news a spokesman for the Canadian Public Health Association suggested that people in the area should be examined to see if they also had high levels of fluoride. Albright and Wilson and their phosphorus plant were again seen as polluters. Could what they said about the safety of the incinerator be trusted? Fewer and fewer people thought so.

On September 11 the Ontario government imposed a complete ban on the construction of new municipal incinerators. The reasons given were much the same as those SNAGG used in their opposition to the Long Harbour project.

The September issue of "Waste Not," an American environmental newsletter, revealed some shocking facts about the company, Ogden Martin, that NARR had chosen to run the Long Harbour incinerator.

The newsletter reported that a large incinerator in India run by Ogden Martin was a dirty operation. Huge quantities of toxic material were being released into the air, illegally. There were thousands of violations. The company was being sued by four different government agencies.

SNAGG happily distributed this information.

Coalition and SNAGG meetings in November were full to capacity. NARR had become curiously quiet. SNAGG was louder and more confident.

"We were winning and we knew it," says Rose. "But we could not stop until the project was completely dead."

On November 29 SNAGG held a giant rally on the steps of the legislature, the Confederation Building. Five hundred people showed up!

Rose, confident at the microphone, addressed the crowd: "Listen to us, NARR! We will be here for as long as it takes. Don't even entertain the thought that we will go away. Please realize that the people of Newfoundland *do not want this incinerator!* So let's get it over with!"

The crowd cheered and shouted their approval. They chanted, "Say No Now!"

The *Telegram* gave front-page coverage to the rally. SNAGG had the momentum, now; there was no question about it.

Rose, Tim, and Linda were at "the bunker" day and night in the fall and into the winter of 1992. By now they enjoyed the help of a dozen volunteers, most of them as committed and energetic as they themselves were. Discussions went well into the night and often continued in the St. John's bars.

Meanwhile Bruce Gilbert was home from Africa. On December 18 he attended a meeting of the Coalition Against Incineration. He listened to a report of what the Coalition and SNAGG had been up to.

They had made two attempts to meet with the Minister of the Environment, Patt Cowan. Both times she had turned them down.

They had contacted Dr. Paul Connett in New York, environmental scientist David Suzuki in Toronto, and Member of Parliament Ross Reid in Ottawa. They were talking with native groups in Newfoundland and Labrador. They had written to environmental groups in Canada and the United States. The Coalition was getting new members at a rate of almost one a week.

Bruce was impressed. He suggested they organize a "learning and planning" conference for the spring. It would be a way of attracting even more groups as well as developing a broader plan of action. Everyone agreed. They were tired but Bruce was full of energy. They gave him the job of organizing the event.

Rose was particularly exhausted. She had worked too hard. A week later at her friend Brenda's house in St. John's she had chest pains.

Rose said to Brenda, "I think I'm having a heart attack."

"A young woman like you? No, my dear, that's gas," said Brenda.

"Take me to the doctor," said Rose. Brenda called a cab. Rose was right. She had suffered a mild heart attack.

Rose spent Christmas of 1992 in the Health Sciences Centre in St. John's.

### **3.4. Victory for SNAGG: NARR Bites the Dust**

Linda Whalen visited Rose in the hospital. "You are under too much stress. You have to slow down," Linda told her.

According to Linda, who printed this in the next CLEAN newsletter, Rose said, "Next to my children, SNAGG is the top priority in my life. It would be more stressful for me *not* to be active in this cause."

The message was that Rose was fine and would be back on the job soon.

Early in January, 1993, St. John's City Council unanimously passed a motion requesting that the government make it illegal to import foreign garbage.

By the middle of January NARR still had not registered their project with the Minister of the Environment. When asked why, NARR spokesman Bob Kennedy explained that the incinerator experts Ogden Martin had not yet reached an agreement with NARR's parent company, Albright and Wilson.

Kennedy admitted that the two companies were examining the possible problems that could arise from building the incinerator on land that had been a heavy industrial area.

"In other words," says Rose Steele, "Ogden Martin did not want to be responsible for cleaning up the site. It was a very; very dirty site, as we all know."

Linda Whalen says, "I think the deal was already dead, in fact. I think Kennedy was paving the way for NARR to back out of the project."

On January 19 Tim Angel and Rose Steele (just out of the hospital) met with Minister of Environment and Lands Pat Cowan and Deputy Minister John Fleming. Tim and Rose reviewed SNAGG's concerns about importing garbage to Newfoundland. They formally requested that the province bring in legislation to protect the province from waste trade exploitation.



PHOTO: Joe Gibbons, *The Evening Telegram*  
Rally on the front steps of Confederation Building, St. John's, November 30, 1992.

Fleming responded that such legislation could hamper a potential recycling industry Tim said, "Surely with all the lawyers you have in here they could find a way to write the law so that it doesn't do that!"

A headline in *The Evening Telegram* on February 2 read, "SNAGG Support Snowballing." The article reported that David Suzuki had written a letter to Patt Cowan asking for "extensive environmental assessment" of the Long Harbour proposal.

A week later Marlene Cashin and Maxine Cochrane of SNAGG Placentia met with Bill Hogan. Marlene asked him if he had changed his mind after hearing that 79 per cent of people opposed it. "No," he said. "No, it is still a good idea. Once people understand the technology involved, they will accept it."

On February 15, rather suddenly, the end came for NARR. The headline on the front page of *The Evening Telegram* read, "GARBAGE PROJECT STUMBLES." The paper reported that NARR had admitted that until "all possible future liabilities" of the Albright and Wilson phosphorus plant site are ironed out, "major stakeholders will not commit to the project." The site did not offer the "virgin land" Ogden Martin is accustomed to, NARR said.

A spokesman for Ogden Martin insisted that his company was still negotiating with Albright and Wilson. "But liability is the key. There is no project unless that is resolved to our satisfaction," he said, pointing out that the east side of the site contains phosphorus ponds where waste products are under water.

It was known that should those ponds dry up the phosphorus would spontaneously burst into flames and massive amounts of toxins would go into the atmosphere.

Gary Keating was upset with the news. In an interview he charged that Albright and Wilson were trying to shirk the cleanup of the site. "The town council is determined to see that Albright and Wilson will remain liable for the contaminants on the site," the mayor of Long Harbour said. His council was writing to Albright and Wilson to encourage them to negotiate in good faith. But there was little hope.

Bill Callahan's editorial ("Say Goodbye to NARR") in the *Telegram* on February 17, 1993, announced the death of the incinerator project. Callahan was gracious. He felt sorry for the people of Long Harbour for the loss of the jobs that would have come with the project. Callahan had written the editorial exactly a year from the day SNAGG was founded in Placentia. SNAGG celebrated, but cautiously. They were afraid that even if Ogden Martin was pulling out, some other incinerator expert could step in.

More important, there were already two more proposals to store toxic materials in Newfoundland, one in Bale Verte and the other in Schefferville, Labrador. These projects had already been registered with the government. The battle was not nearly over.

In March Linda Whalen published a major article on the *Telegram* "Forum" page. She had moved away from the Long Harbour issue and instead talked about the other waste disposal schemes that had been registered. She urged the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to adopt environmental legislation that banned completely the importing of waste products.

The Long Harbour incinerator was dead, but SNAGG had a lot more work to do. "In a way we were just getting started," says Rose.

It would be two more years, in fact, before Rose and SNAGG could rest.

Eventually the Bale Verte and Schefferville projects (and several others) were defeated, too.

But that is another story.

### **3.5. Aftermath: Tying Up the Loose Ends**

At the end of March, 1993, the Coalition Against Incineration held a "Networking Workshop" in St. John's. The Coalition had grown quite large. It now represented more than 20 groups of citizens concerned about environmental issues and the future of Newfoundland.

The participants made an historical timeline that charted the activities of the various groups represented at the workshop. Bruce Gilbert led two days of meetings and workshops.

They analysed the Long Harbour project and the new attempts to store industrial waste in Bale Verte and Schefferville. They discussed incineration, the toxic waste trade, and the global economic situation that brought such proposals to the shores of Newfoundland.

It was clear to everyone that if rural regions were more prosperous, proposals such as the Long Harbour incinerator would never be considered.

Meanwhile a provincial election had been called for May 3, five weeks away. The Coalition saw an opportunity to communicate with the candidates. Methods of getting their attention during the campaign were listed. The list included media events, music festivals, use of the open line shows, attendance at political meetings in various districts, guerrilla theatre, and even civil disobedience.

The workshop participants decided that candidates in the election would be asked questions. When they learned the standard answers, the questions would be changed. All candidates would be forced to

declare their position on environmental issues. A ragtag local protest group was becoming a sophisticated political machine.

### Say Goodbye to NARR

Few people — with the possible exception of the town councillors of Long Harbour, desperate for a new industry for the town — will regret the fact the fact that the North American Resource Recovery project seems to be going down the tubes.

This is the proposal to bring a million tonnes annually of U.S. garbage to the Placentia Bay town for incineration. It seems to have run aground on the slag heap and the shoals of the settling ponds of the former phosphorous plant. According to a spokesman for NARR, the international waste-producing firm Ogden Martin, which is the key to the proposal, will not become involved until all potential liabilities connected with the contaminated site have been settled.

It's possible to sympathize with Mayor Gary Keating and his colleagues. After enjoying for a quarter century the benefits of modern industry with its high-paying jobs, it is quite understandable they would be looking hard for a replacement for the defunct Albright and Wilson operation.

But there is more than just Long Harbour or the Placentia Bay area involved. As many people have been saying since the proposal was first broached, the image of a far-off island in the Atlantic where unwanted refuse could be sent, out of sight and out of mind, is hardly one to encourage tourists to come to Newfoundland.

Who wants to spend vacations time visiting the last resting place of their own garbage?

*Bill Callahan editorial, The Evening Telegram, February 17, 1993.*

In mid April Dick Kelly, president of local 7428 of the United Steelworkers of America, joined Gary Keating and the Long Harbour council in criticizing Albright and Wilson for their attitude toward the cleanup of the ERCO site.

Albright and Wilson were now talking of "containing" the mess, not cleaning it up. Kelly and his union did not think that this was good enough.

No other company will come within a mile of the site if it is not cleaned up, Kelly said.

His union planned to meet with environmental groups to discuss the matter.

At the end of April Linda Whalen drove to Placentia to pick up Rose Steele, her three children, and as many of their possessions as they could fit in the car. Rose had finally moved to St. John's.

Rose remembers spending her first three days in town on the phone calling every candidate in the upcoming election and demanding to know their position on environmental legislation.

On May 3 the Wells government was returned to power with an even bigger majority Bill Hogan was narrowly defeated by Nick Careen, the coordinator of the Placentia Area Development Association.

On May 16 Linda Whalen and the new SNAGG St. John's president Jim Brokenshire flew to Washington, DC, to accept an award for "outstanding work in fighting for environmental justice."

The award was given by the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, an environmental network of 8,000 grassroots groups with a combined membership of more than one million people across North America.

Ralph Nader, well-known consumer advocate and environmental crusader, made the presentation. Linda spoke about SNAGG and the environmental issues facing Newfoundland. SNAGG was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Grassroots Movement for Environmental Justice.

On June 1, 1993, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) announced that it had discontinued funding to Albright and Wilson and North American Resource Recovery (NARR). Provincial Environment Minister Patt Cowan finally admitted that the project was dead.

The reasons given by ACOA for stopping the funds were:

- Failure by NARR to register the project
- Failure to have sales agreements in place
- Failure to complete the feasibility study by the date agreed upon

Federal Minister of Fisheries John Crosbie (responsible for ACOA) made the announcement. He suggested other reasons for withdrawing the funds. He mentioned the adverse public opinion stirred up by SNAGG and the Coalition. He also believed that the NARR project would almost certainly not pass the provincial environmental assessment.

"And there are," Crosbie added, "questions as to the legitimacy, intentions, liabilities, connections, and cash flow of the various companies involved."

### 3.6. The Last Word Goes to Rose

Twelve years after the phosphorus plant closed, the old ERCO site is still not cleaned up. It continues to be "contained." Albright and Wilson pays a few workers to keep water in the settling ponds. They do not want an environmental disaster.

There are still no laws in Newfoundland about importing foreign garbage. The Department of Environment and Lands has, however adopted an internal policy forbidding the importation of garbage to the province.

Rose Steele lives in St. John's. Her kids are nearly grown up. She fondly remembers the years with SNAGG. "I remember it as a tremendous struggle, but also as very exciting," says Rose.

"It was all new to me. I learned so much, especially from Bruce and Linda. We worked our asses off for nearly three years. First there was me and Bruce and Marlene, then Tim came on board, then Linda. That was the core. After that Vicki Hammond got involved, and Elizabeth Goodridge and Raylene Young and Andrea Wells and lots more, I can't name them all."

"Tina and I lost the café. I was distracted, shall we say. People stopped coming there because of SNAGG, that was part of it. They accused us of resisting progress and development, of taking jobs away from our area. But that's not what we wanted to do. We knew how important the jobs were, we knew how hard up people were. We did a lot of soul searching, believe me. But we knew that the incinerator was not the way to go."

"I mean, why poison our lakes, rivers, and reservoirs, why ruin the health of our children for 40 or 50 jobs? Some people were willing to ruin our tourist industry to put a few people to work. It didn't make sense in the long run."

### Rose Steele on what SNAGG contributed:

*Ontario was in the process of banning all new municipal incinerators. They were dangerous and bad for people's health, that's why. The Americans were rejecting them, too. Of 163 applications for incinerators they had approved less than a dozen. Building a giant incinerator in Long Harbour was definitely not the way to go, and in the last poll nine out of 10 Newfoundlanders were opposed to it. But still our government wouldn't take a stand against it. Why? Why were they so hard to convince? There were two reasons, I think. The first is that politicians were used to not paying attention to people. That seems obvious. The second is that government and industry are so much in bed with each other That's the way the system works. That's why a project like this could happen even in the face of tremendous opposition.*

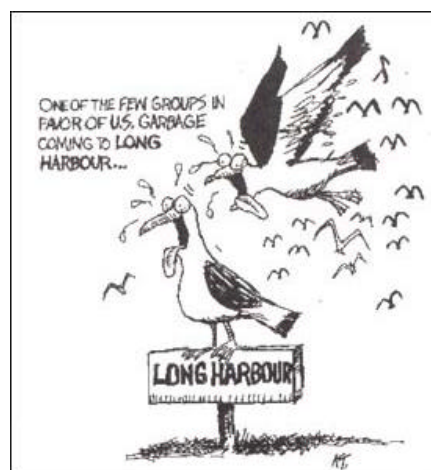
*NARR applied for and got a million dollars of taxpayers' money and then they spent it promoting their cause. They met with high levels of government, they hobnobbed, they wined and dined and sent people on trips. And they hired a big advertising agency to print slick pamphlets that talked about jobs and electricity but never mentioned what comes out of the smokestack. It was not in their interest to tell the truth about incinerators or landfills.*

*Clyde Wells felt he had to be "fair." The companies have right to register the idea with government, they have a right to an Environmental Impact Study, he said. To give him credit, though, I'm sure he knew that the project would never pass the test, not after the information SNAGG made public.*

*Maybe it is easier for people to protest now, after SNAGG. Maybe we changed things a bit. Maybe some politicians will listen quicker now. Aside from stopping the madness, that is perhaps what we contributed.*

"Thank God we stopped it. And the other ones, too. There never was any legislation but there's a policy, at least. If they ever try to change that policy they will hear from us again, and quickly."

"On a personal level? I moved to St. John's and I like it here. I do miss Placentia, though. The big thing is that my kids saw me working like a dog and they respected me for it. I was a café owner and I became an activist. They are proud of me, I think. Maybe with good reason, too. I'm kind of proud of myself in many ways."



Courtesy of Kevin Tobin/The Evening Telegram

An editorial cartoon which appeared in *The Telegram*, May 20, 1992.



### Sources

The author conducted interviews with people involved with SNAGG, and consulted newspaper articles and other records.

### Rose Steele: The SNAGG Story

#### PART THREE: The Battle for Hearts and Minds

##### Questions for Discussion

###### 3.1. Shots from the Bunker

1. What work did Rose, Tim, and Linda do at this stage in the protest?
2. How did volunteers help SNAGG?
3. What was the opinion of Rex Murphy and Ray Guy on the incinerator issue?

###### 3.2 Political Developments

1. What did Len Simms ask for in his letter to John Crosbie?
2. How did newspaper columnists feel about the incinerator?
3. Which government ministers attended the Coalition Against Incineration meeting?
4. What did the Department of Health investigation find?

###### 3.3. The Home Stretch

1. What did Linda Whalen think the CBC poll showed?
2. What did SNAGG reveal about Ogden Martin's incineration operation?
3. How many people came to the SNAGG rally on November 29?

###### 3.4. Victory for SNAGG: NARR Bites the Dust

1. Why did NARR say it had not registered the incinerator project?
2. What did David Suzuki ask Patt Cowan to do?
3. How did the CBC poll affect the protest?
4. Why did the NARR proposal finally fail?

###### 3.5. Aftermath: Tying Up the Loose Ends

1. Who led the discussion at the Coalition workshop in March, 1993?
2. Why did Dick Kelly criticize Albright and Wilson?
3. Why did SNAGG get an award in Washington?
4. According to ACOA and John Crosbie, why had NARR failed?

###### 3.6. The Last Word Goes to Rose

1. How is the pollution at the old ERCO plant "contained"?
2. Is it illegal to import foreign garbage to Newfoundland?
3. According to Rose, why was it so difficult for SNAGG to communicate with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador?
4. What is Rose most happy about on a personal level?
5. Do you think Rose has reasons to be proud?