

Congratulations Lou—Happy Retirement!

Thank you for decades of leadership and community organizing

In light of Lou Zeller's August 18, 2021 retirement from the position of Executive Director of BREDL, which he has held since 2012, BREDL staff interviewed him to give him an opportunity to reminisce about the history of BREDL, the history of his role in its founding, development, and operations, and his wishes for the future of BREDL. All BREDL staff are going to miss working with Lou, and we offer our warmest wishes for what we know will be a fun-packed retirement!

Interviewer: *Can you talk about Bernard Goss and Janet Marsh's decision at the founding of BREDL to use chapters as an integral element in the structure of the BREDL organization?*

Lou: People like Bernard Goss saw that places that were sited for one waste dump would be sited for another environmental threat later on. Decisions on where to build polluting facilities are based on political power, not scientific merit. It's a plain English description of something which academics have demonstrated over the years. Dr. Robert Bullard, author of *Dumping in Dixie*, was an excellent researcher. He said you can predict proximity of pollution by Zip Code. Designated areas, sacrifice zones, according to Zip Code. Bernard Goss saw the same thing. Our single issue in 1984 through 1986 was a high level radioactive waste dump for the nation's atomic waste produced by normal operation of fission reactors at nuclear power stations. Southern Appalachia, which Bernard knew about, had coal mining, oil excavation, forestry, the same communities getting targeted again and again for nasty facilities.

A BREDL chapter is an association designed to win the immediate campaign by mobilizing resources and getting a reputation for winning. After the win, that chapter group, by being affiliated with a larger organization and perhaps moving onto another issue of an entirely different nature, would be there when the next threat came. It might be totally different – solid waste, asphalt, incinerator – that chapter's core group would still be there, under the umbrella of the League. Some chapters have had two or three campaigns. During the period between fights, projects can be undertaken to build unity, strengths, and associations. A BREDL chapter in Tennessee has an annual Christmas party that's a lot of fun and worth going to, food, drink and treats, a real Christmas party. It's done every year, and keeps the group intact. They've won two victories so far.

In Burke County, North Carolina, the first campaign was a hazardous waste tank farm, then a landfill. Then the chapter pursued enactment of a land use management ordinance as a tripwire to future environmental threats. They stayed around to enact this ordinance based on their reputation for stopping the tank farm. They had credibility and moxie to be a political presence on the policy of land use management in Burke County. Then a new waste dump was proposed. The chapter was there and ready to go.

Bernard's concept in using chapters as the foundation of BREDL was that they would be soundly rooted for the long term in the community of people directly affected by an issue, not going anywhere, forming associations that would last for decades. Not every BREDL chapter is committed to doing that, however. Sometimes a chapter will win and then they go back to soccer games and church and other activities

that make life worth living. Even in that case, they've got our name and number and we've got theirs, so when something happens, we each know who to call. The chapter in Hamlet, North Carolina fought a low-level radioactive waste dump during the 80s and 90s. It took years, but they were successful. About six months ago, after a biochar facility was proposed in the same community, a local resident called BREDL, saying, "My daddy said I should call you."

Some chapters last decades. The chapter in Sanford is an interesting example. The Cumnock Preservation Association on the banks of the Deep River, found itself in the crosshairs of proposed fracking in the Triassic basin (the threat remains), and decided to become a BREDL chapter. In 2014, the Dan River coal ash spill happened-inflaming controversy over coal ash disposal. The state of North Carolina began looking for places to dump coal ash. They chose Chatham and Lee Counties. The Cumnock group then morphed into EnvironmentalLEE (ELEE). The chapter was, by that time, geared up and ready to go, with some of the same people from the original preservation association. ELEE is in the process of reformulating the chapter in the wake of BREDL's coal ash victory. BREDL staffers, Therese Vick and Lou Zeller, have been there all along the way. Therese became their supporting "alma mater". She is so good at working with people!

Interviewer: *In your April, 2019 Executive Director's report in the League Line, you write about how a reporter, interviewing Janet in 1995, asked her, "Can you win?" You say that Janet replied to this question without hesitation, saying,*

"Yes, without a doubt. Whenever a group of people put together a citizens' action campaign and develop and implement strategies and ask themselves how far they'll go and what they're willing to do; as long as the answer is 'Whatever it takes,' they can't possibly lose."

Could you reflect on the meaning of Janet's use of "Whatever it takes"?

Lou: The reason I wrote about that, and the reason Janet said it, is because it's true. It sounds simple, whatever it takes, but it is the key to success. This seems to be the difference between us and other environmental organizations. We pick up the fight, the campaign, even when the odds are against you, overwhelming odds against you. You've seen this happen, victories we've had when it was deemed impossible or not winnable, or not worth the sacrifice it would take to win. But when people's homes, neighborhoods, communities, families and neighbors are at risk, of course they are willing to do whatever it takes. But somebody's got to say it.

In the heat of a campaign, we'll get a news story, phone call, or text message with a cry for help, saying, "Can you help us? We heard about you." Until organized, these people have the strength and the power but don't see it and don't utilize it. So it seems fruitless to do anything about the issue because they are up against a powerful company with money and lawyers, or a state agency that issues permits, or a federal agency that's got all the money in the world and experts galore to wreak environmental havoc. That's where we started out. In 1985, I started hearing about federal plans for a high-level nuclear waste dump that would hold fuel rods from nuclear power stations after they had been irradiated for several years.

We were a citizen group in Madison County, North Carolina with about 15-20 people. We heard about this person (Janet) who was traveling all over the country and was well spoken about the nuclear waste

issue. That's how we first heard about BREDL. Arrayed against us was the federal government, U.S. Dept. of Energy, investor-owned and public utilities, Duke, and Dominion Power, who were looking for areas all over the U.S. for the right geology they thought would isolate the radiation that would be generated by intensely irradiated fuel rods. They were looking at potential sites in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Maine, Wisconsin, Mississippi, and Texas. How could we think that we could prevail? But we did.

One day while riding down the road going to a meeting somewhere, I hear on the radio that North Carolina has been selected for a low-level nuclear waste dump. On hearing that, I slammed my hand on top of the dashboard and said, "What in the heck is going on here?" Here we were being targeted for a high-level nuclear dump for half or more of the nation's irradiated fuel. And then another insult comes right along, a different agency, different agents, different body of authority, different law, but falling on the heels of this other campaign. And another year went by and we heard about a hazardous waste incinerator that EPA wanted to build in North Carolina to serve several nearby states. EPA had received authorization from the North Carolina General Assembly. This incinerator would become the third of BREDL's earliest campaigns.

Our role as a grassroots organization was to find out the facts, first of all. We obtained this information from the most reliable sources, the agencies charged with permitting such things. We requested and received boxes of information. When Janet held her first public forum in Glendale Springs, she invited the whole community, including some elected officials. She didn't put the public officials on the dais so that they could spout information in our direction. She had the elected officials sitting in the front of the room as part of the audience, not to speak, but to listen. Janet had reversed the roles.

How many times have you heard community activists say, "We've gotta get Rep. So-and-So to speak at our meeting." Or a company representative, which will get people lined up at the door to attend. But you are playing with a weak hand in those cases. Whether an elected official or company representative, they've already got answers to the smartest question you can ask. What Janet did in Glendale Springs in 1985 was to have the public officials listen to what we had to say. We had knowledgeable speakers lined up that day, and the elected officials got a lesson in how much we had been able to learn about nuclear waste. They also got the lesson that the people were not happy and were taking steps to organize themselves. The people were garnering political power, not through party politics, but much more fundamentally, what the United States is built on.

When BREDL gets called into a community, one of our first underlying missions, whether it's a county, state, or federal issue, is to alter the balance of power. That's what "whatever it takes" means. Whatever it is that you can do to establish your own credibility in having accurate information. Being able to put that information out in a way which is understandable to the lay person. Our mission is fighting the battle for public opinion, which is the highest court in the land, not with lawyers, but in the public. If you want to get the word out, how do you do it? BREDL offers workshops on how to get publicity, do a press release, write a fact sheet. Getting your message out costs a bit of money. Yard signs can run into hundreds of dollars. T-shirts are popular items for building solidarity. Billboards on major highways give people the message day after day. Showing up at a public hearing or at a county meeting in numbers is a good thing. It gives a visible sign of unrest in the community, altering the balance of power.

Sometimes you don't have the numbers, so you've got to be creative to amplify your voice. The group in Anson County, North Carolina fighting a commercial waste dump had their members contribute photos of family members, which were then printed on 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper. They spread these photos all over the floor of the entryway of the county courthouse, forcing elected officials to walk over the photos of the people who were against the project. That tactic inspired unity, was non-violent, and boxed the officials in.

One group took the signed petitions they had collected and, instead of putting them in a stack, taped them together and rolled them onto a stick. This "trail" of petitions was unrolled at the public hearing, some 50-60 feet long.

"Whatever it takes" means not taking the easy way out. I don't know how many times Janet railed against a large statewide national group during the hazardous waste incinerator fight, which involved five different states. One of these powerful organizations was working with the government on an ash landfill rulemaking. When you burn hazardous waste, you end up with ash which is toxic because of heavy metals and other toxic components. Here was a national environmental organization with a lot of money and expertise, and they had become part of the problem, saying, "The incinerator is coming, our job is to make it as good as possible. We'll write strict regulations on how ash is disposed of." We would go ballistic when we heard that. Our mission was not to have it built at all. Making a friendlier incinerator makes your job harder, and is not helpful. "Whatever it takes" means taking a clear stand. How do you justify halfway measures to the public, calling it a little bit noxious, a little less of a threat? "Whatever it takes" means you say "we're going to stop it". You work everywhere to unify people. That's whatever it takes, and that's what won the day. The high-level and low-level nuclear waste dumps never got constructed. The fight against the plutonium fuel factory was a 20-year campaign, in which BREDL worked internationally. Plutonium fuel would be a risk to the safety and well-being of people not only at the factory site in South Carolina, but everywhere else that would use that plutonium in their power stations. That campaign began in 1997. We worked with national groups that had knowledge in that area. The project was cancelled in 2018. If we had fought for only five years and quit, the plutonium fuel factory may very well have been constructed.

Public advocacy law firms have been a great help to our cause. However, unless the facility you are fighting is illegal or the company has done something against the law, a legal strategy can merely buy you time, serve as a stalling tactic. Federal and state projects are not done in contravention to the law. To the contrary, power companies worked a good ten years or so getting the rules straight on eminent domain, so that they weren't doing anything illegal in that area on the pipelines. They may be double-dealing, but they ain't stupid. Going for the legal tactic, although often part of "whatever it takes", is just one tool, along with public education, direct action, fund raising. Each step must be doable, each subsequent step becomes more doable based on the previous step, all lead to the goal. That's "whatever it takes". Do first things first, leave things that look impossible for later in the campaign. Aim for systematic ramping up of pressure by the people, changing balance of power, putting power into the hands of people instead of those of captured public officials.

Captured public officials are those who have bought the company line. This company has waltzed into town. They are well dressed, well spoken, they know how to do public relations, and they offer a

smattering of technical information. They are primarily publicists and can present a convincing argument, typically focusing on job creation. County and state officials' eyes light up when they hear "jobs". They don't question it. It's up to the people who are directly affected to say, "Wait a minute. Where does this lead? Who gets the pollution? Who gets the groundwater contamination? Who gets the asthma from an asphalt plant built in a residential area?" Captured officials are officials who haven't examined the issue well enough to understand that it's bad news for their community.

But they can become uncaptured. In Surry County, North Carolina there was a BREDL fight to stop a poultry manure incinerator electricity generating power plant. This plant had been sanctioned by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2007 as part of the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard, of all things. They had prominent environmental groups lined up behind it, requiring renewable energy, a certain percentage by a certain date. County commissioners were convinced of the value of the poultry manure incinerator and had approved infrastructure to support the project, including a water line to the incinerator site. A BREDL campaign, using all the tactics we have discussed in this interview and more, ramped up. We were able to reverse the county commission's decision, and they rescinded the project. All five of the commissioners voted against the project. Surry County is not like Durham or Asheville or some other liberal bastion. This is Surry County, a very conservative culture.

Tenacity, endurance, and persistence are oftentimes the key, part of "whatever it takes". This is determination to see a project through to the end and not give up. That's the purpose of community organizing, and expecting one, two, or six people to do all the work is a lot to ask. Therefore, you organize a working group, a committee, a local organization, people who are directly affected. When one person steps down or has a job change or life change, or is simply exhausted from late night calls and all the stuff involved in a fight, there is somebody else who says, "Let's continue the campaign." New people step up to fill the shoes. Leadership could change, can become a shared responsibility.

Interviewer: *Can you reflect on your skit as Captain Slow?*

Lou: *Captain Slow* was a character I did in the public school for grade school students. The kids liked it and the teachers liked it as well. It was a really fun way to bring environmental issues to children of the people in the community. BREDL is an educational organization. I did the children's programs for that reason alone. It didn't hurt to have the ancillary benefit of presenting something like *Big Throwaway: A Comedy of Global Impact*, and *Compost Chef, a blend of science and magic*. *Big Throwaway* is silent comedy, based on a Charlie Chaplin routine which I borrowed from and turned into an allegory about our throw-away society. It had the benefit of not only educating children, but also allowing us the opportunity to give each child in attendance a flyer to take home and show to Mom and Dad. So it allowed us to do some community organizing, as well.

Interviewer: *What can you share about your role as Compost Chef?*

Lou: *Compost Chef* was a magic show for young children, designed to spark imagination and showcase what might otherwise be the tedious subject of making compost, which is about as exciting as watching cement dry. It was a magic show in which I offered a series of tricks and small stage magic routines. I made flowers grow out of compost, for example. I showed how you can put your kitchen waste into a container and do certain things with it, and after a period of time you get fertilizer, flowers, and food.

Interviewer: *Please describe your role in Radioactive Money Machine.*

Lou: *Radioactive Money Machine* was edgier. It evolved over the years, focused on the nuclear dump issue. The first time I did the routine was in 1987. I had been doing this kind of work before I came to BREDL. New Vaudeville, it is called. Some routines I had done were slapstick and juggling. I went to classes, workshops, and retreats to get training, worked with various artists of national and international renown. One of these was Yuri Belov, a Russian comedian who held a workshop in Philadelphia where I learned about comedic timing and the requirements of comedy. I also studied with Peter Hoff, an American clown, from whom I learned about putting a program together through a series of steps. Leo Bassi gave a workshop which I attended on being creative, being convincing in your role as actor. Leo was challenging. He would come up with routines and set up a scenario with two or three participants, all of whom were actors, then critique us after we tried it. Then he would have us try it again. All this took place in an urban neighborhood in Philadelphia. Leo would make up stories, saying, "Go over to that shop over there, convince them that you have a supply of chicken eggs, really good eggs, and that you can provide them to the shopkeeper." It was totally made up. I did comedy on stage in an auditorium, and some was on the street in the real world.

Then I started providing workshops, one of which was CROP Walk in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in behalf of a nonprofit called CROP. Their mission was feeding the hungry, and they would do a walk every year. I provided training workshops for them on how to make up characters, characters in costume.

I worked in the world of New Vaudeville during the 1970s and 80s. At that time, I was doing musical work, playing in an acoustic jug band. I met a team of performers who combined juggling and comedy. We swapped ideas. I learned how to juggle, and we formed an outfit together. We would do shows for bars and clubs in Georgia and North Carolina. They were slapstick, juggling, vaudeville routines, not musical shows.

Earth Stage grew out of that history. *Radioactive Money Machine* was one of the most edgy of these routines. Before getting involved with BREDL, around 1982, I did a skit called *Major General Destruction*. It was about the arms race, a routine I developed where I played a military man in a general's uniform. I went to the local Salvation Army and bought a military officer's jacket, to which I attached badges and medals. I carried a suitcase onto the stage. It was a juggling routine, juggling two nuclear missiles and a ball, which was Planet Earth. I was a madcap general playing with Earth's future.

Charles Chaplin did a silent movie in which he played a comic rendition of Hitler. He has a very large beach ball which is Planet Earth, which he bounces during the skit. This gave me the germ of the idea for *Big Throwaway*, which I performed for children and adults. In the skit, you can see a prop that's a trash can filled with objects. I would do slapstick, chasing the objects around on stage, juggling plastic jugs and aluminum cans. All ended up in the trash can. The finale was a large inflated beach ball globe, the Earth, three to four feet in diameter. I would do a dance, bouncing the ball on the floor while dancing, playing with the Earth as with a toy. At the end of the program, I would put the Earth on top of the filled up trash can. Voices appeared out of nowhere, scolding me for throwing the Earth away. The protagonist was learning about not throwing the Earth away. He rescues the Earth and says he's sorry while standing on top of the trash heap. Kids and adults would get into it.

I did this type of skit in concert with BREDL chapters and other local groups trying to stop waste dumps. The routine took 20 to 25 minutes. The local leader would come out at the end of each skit and talk about the issue at hand. Flyers would be distributed.

Interviewer: *How many of those skits do you think you did, in total, and where did you do them?*

Lou: Scores, close to 100 shows, pretty much all over the BREDL service area, a lot in North Carolina and Georgia, and other states as well.

Interviewer: *Can you tell us the story behind the photo, dated February 21, 1990, of you being hauled out of a public meeting?*

Lou: We were in the thick of the low-level radioactive waste dump campaign. A meeting had been scheduled at the PBS television station, WUNC in Raleigh, North Carolina. We had been working against the state of North Carolina's search for a place to dump 30 million cubic feet of low-level radioactive waste. This type of waste includes pretty much everything that goes into the trash at a nuclear power plant, including gloves and booties that you wear in a radioactive area, white plastic suits, and scintillation vials. Low-level nuclear waste actually includes the power plant itself, once the fuel rods, which are the high-level waste, have been removed. The nuclear industry emphasized the gloves and booties and other medical waste as the principal type of waste in this category. We did years of research starting in 1986 to uncover facts about this so-called low-level radioactive waste. For example, I did a study, went to the radiation protection section of the state of North Carolina and obtained copies of every permit, every bill of lading for hospital and medical radioactive waste in the state of North Carolina. I tallied it all up. My study found that the amount of medical radioactive waste was a fraction of a fraction of a decimal point of the total they were talking about. The industry was misrepresenting it.

This report was just one of the studies that I did for this campaign. I did a study on the track record of companies seeking the license to build the low level radioactive waste dump site. Two different firms were in the running for this contract, Westinghouse and Chem-Nuclear Systems. My study of their track records was released in 1988. It contained original research based on my communications with citizen activists living in areas where these companies had operating facilities. I talked to people in Ohio, Alabama and other states about the companies' environmental violations. In 1988, legislation was being considered in the North Carolina General Assembly about choosing one of these two companies to operate the radioactive dump. We threw a stink bomb into this legislative process through the issuance of my report.

Armed with information that could not be disputed, we organized around the state, working in close concert with North Carolina Clean Water Fund, which still exists. The state of North Carolina had narrowed the prospective sites for the low-level nuclear waste site to four locations, two in the western part of the state and two in the east. BREDL took on the western sites. We organized in those communities in the west until they were removed from consideration. We did a lot of publicity, including the *Radioactive Money Machine*. The site search was narrowed from four to two. Janet and Lisa Finaldi from North Carolina Clean Water Fund put their heads together and divided the two sites up again, with North Carolina Clean Water Fund working at the site in Apex and BREDL in Hamlet. Janet, Denise Lee and I spent a lot of time going to Hamlet, working with citizens' groups and a couple named

Bobbie and Beverly Quick.

The North Carolina Low-level Radioactive Waste Management Authority was a 17-member committee of scientists and industry people charged by the state with selecting the waste dump site. We had been to many of their public hearings, and decided to attend the one scheduled in 1990 to occur at a PBS television station in Raleigh. The meeting, at which they were going to discuss their decision on where to place the dump, would be broadcast as part of *Stateline*, a public interest interview program which was also broadcast into public schools as part of the curricula. The industry and the authority were going to use public airwaves to broadcast this meeting at the level of junior and senior high school students. When we first learned about these plans, Janet and I were in Alabama working with Doug and Kaye Kiker, longtime friends, on some video work. When we got to Kaye's house, we got on the phone and called Pete Hill. He is one of the early mentors for BREDL's work who had held several workshops not long after BREDL's founding in the 1980s to discuss strategy and tactics, how to do direct action and demonstrations which upset the balance of power. Pete was also one of the attendees at a meeting in Maryville, Tennessee in 1987 which formed the Southern Environmental Network, a 22-state coalition.

We called Pete from Kaye's phone in Alabama, told him of the planned public television broadcast by the North Carolina Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Authority. We told him we were really worried, asked, how could you counter something in a TV station. A demonstration wouldn't do well because of the limited number of people inside the station. We came up with a plan.

On the date of the Authority's meeting, we arrived early at the TV station, me dressed in jacket and tie and Janet in a nice outfit. Our plan was for someone to stand up and disrupt the proceeding by speaking from the audience, and do it in a way which was not ugly or violent or rude in any way. We had recruited 15-20 volunteers from the Radioactive Waste Roundtable to work with us, keeping our plans a close secret. We entered the TV station when they opened the doors and spread ourselves out throughout the studio, not together. We were ready.

The program started. The Roundtable had selected one person to be the first to speak out of turn. I was that person. The Authority gavelled the meeting into order. I was supposed to pull the trigger when the time seemed right. I knew it had to be early. Dr. Murray, chair of the Authority, banged the gavel. The meeting was called to order and they had the reading of the minutes. The secretary explained the cut-and-dried meeting agenda. Then Dr. Murray asked if there were any additions or changes. I saw my moment and stood up from where I had been seated in the third or fourth row in the studio. I said, "Dr. Murray, I do have a statement I would like to make at this time, if you please." Dr. Murray was shocked for anybody to do this. I said, "Dr. Murray, I think this is an important issue." He gavelled me down, saying, "You're out of order." I said, "But Dr. Murray, this is a much larger issue, people have come to tell you that choosing a nuclear waste site is an act of great injustice, and we need to bring it to your attention." I didn't stop talking. By now the fact that it was in a TV studio meant it wasn't just PBS, it was also the network news media, CBS, ABC, NBC, in addition to PBS. All cameras were on Lou Zeller now speaking out of turn. I stood there and kept the spiel going at a steady pace.

I watched the Authority members trying to figure out what to do with me. The two leaders of the group were there representing their firms, Carolina Power & Light and Duke Energy. I heard someone say, "Mr.

Zeller, we're going to have you escorted out of the room if you don't sit down." I continued in the same determined manner. Dr. Murray called in two State Bureau of Investigation security people to escort me out of the room. Improvising, I decided to go limp. The SBI said, "Oh no." They picked me up. It took them several minutes as I stayed limp. I didn't stand up, just sat like a doll. Two guys picked me up. They had to clear the way and carried me out of the studio, down the hallway, and out the back door, then dropped me in some mud.

The plan was to have others speak in turn after me. Right after me was one of the members of the Roundtable, Kaye Cameron, in a blue dress. She got up to speak as soon as I was removed from the studio. Kaye did not go limp when Dr. Murray sent the two security personnel to escort her out of the studio. The Authority waited a few minutes to get back to order. Then another person stood up and got escorted out. Then another spoke and was escorted out, for a total of eight or nine escorts. We stole the meeting, stopped this attempt by the Authority to up the ante and further their cause through use of the public TV station.

All the school children in North Carolina that day watching the Stateline program, which is still a program on PBS, everybody in the whole state saw it that day on PBS and other news channels. "Activists filibuster Authority meeting" was the headline in the news. Janet said that was a gift and a turning point in the campaign. The Authority never recovered from that blow. Their credibility was diminished. Legislators saw this, word spread that the Authority was trumped by citizens at that meeting, locally-affected citizens such as Kaye Cameron, and Pam Dodson from the Hamlet site, standing up, making statements against the waste dump, and getting escorted out of the room.

None of the protestors was charged with a violation after being escorted out of the room. They could have been charged, but weren't. Long-time BREDL activist, Denise Lee, who was on hand at the event, says that when they were carrying me out of the room, she heard me say, "Don't drop me."

Turning adversity to advantage, whatever it takes.

Interviewer: *What is the significance of the term "sand in the gears" in the context of a fight undertaken by a BREDL chapter?*

Lou: One of BREDL's flagship fights was opposition to a low-level nuclear waste dump proposed by the Southeast Compact, which was an eight-state consortium, a legal and administrative agreement among eight states to select one of them for the first of eight dump sites for low-level radioactive waste. Each of the eight states was supposed to take their turn hosting a waste dump site for 20 years. They started doing geological analyses, taking into consideration whether prospective sites were on the coast, in sandy areas, in the western mountainous part of the state, or inside special geological formation. The North Carolina Radioactive Waste Management Authority was set up to do the site selection process for eight states' worth of radioactive waste. They went through a decision making process in which they selected a group of prospective target areas first, then selected potential dump sites, two in the west, and two in the eastern part of the state. They were attempting to divide and conquer, pitting one part of the state against another.

The same process was used for an incinerator. A series of sites was selected for study in different counties, mostly in rural areas. They played one part of the state against the other. The turning point

was when the Granville County and Iredell County groups began working together. They countered this selection process with a unifying theme – “Not here, not there, not anywhere.” They started doing joint fund raising. BREDL went to 22 different counties with our campaign. Granville and Iredell Counties coming together was a turning point. Then they joined BREDL, as did a number of the 22 communities where we conducted campaigns all across North Carolina. We still have a chapter in Statesville, North Carolina, formed during this remarkable campaign.

We worked with a Greenpeace organizer on this campaign. They had a huge bus that went from community to community. I had a truck in which Janet and I drove all over the state doing campaigns. It had a trailer with an 8-foot-wide map of North Carolina. We invited people to attach family photos to this map. We started in Asheville and went west to east. That 8-foot-wide map was covered in photos by the end of the campaign.

The same thing happened with the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. We put resources into organizing, sending BREDL staffer, Cary Rodgers to organize new chapters during 2017 all along the pipeline route. We developed new BREDL chapters in every county through which the pipeline had been routed in North Carolina, except for Robeson County. More sand in the gears, fomenting opposition in Johnston, Cumberland, Halifax, Wilson, Nash Counties, and up into Virginia with chapters in Buckingham and Nelson Counties.

BREDL's Environmental Justice Coordinator, Charles Utley, uses sand in the gears. Concerned Citizens of Shell Bluff has been fighting Plant Vogtle since 2006. Their challenge of a license for the Savannah River Site's plutonium fuel factory in South Carolina took 20 years. By placing sand in the gears, creating opposition in the community and in the courts, they slowed the process down. Savannah River Site was granted a license for construction of the plutonium fuel factory, which BREDL had challenged before the Atomic Safety Licensing Board. That bought us time. Then we challenged the operating permit in 2007. Both permits were issued, but behind schedule, bills piling up. Meanwhile, earth was turning. Rapprochement in the form of a joint agreement between the U.S. and Russia, Clinton and Yeltsin, evaporated. This agreement, which would have turned warheads into nuclear power fuel, foundered politically in the U.S. and Russia. Sand in the gears slowed the process down. It was during this process that I first met Charles Utley, during a campaign in Augusta, Georgia.

“Sand in the gears” is a concept I have developed over the years, which is implemented by opposing your opponent everywhere, leaving no weak spots, not picking winners and losers, leaving no sacrifice zones, no weak links in the chain. If there are weak links, that's where you put your strength. “Sand in the gears” is an appropriate metaphor because your opponent with power has nowhere to turn. They have no victim because people are sticking together.

Interviewer: *What are your thoughts about BREDL staff – past, present, and future?*

Lou: The year following the loss of Janet was a rough patch for me and for the organization. The staff behaved and performed so admirably during that period. Everybody had been given a shock, cold splash of water. Everybody muscled up and did what they needed to do. That's been a watch word in the larger issue for all of the work that we do. Most of the work that gets done by the staff – chasing down documents, writing letters, finding, studying, and using test equipment, planning and implementing

meetings, podcasts, newsletters, research, mapping – that is a style of work that BREDL established intrinsically.

In 1986, BREDL got its first grant, which was given by the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. They had enough for one salary, so they hired four quarter-time people, including me. Those of us who had been hired were happy to have a little bit of income from something that we were already doing as activists working to save our home from the risk of a nuclear dump. Every one of those first BREDL staff, including Sandy Adair, Bob Gessner, Virginia Hunt, and me, did what we could do best, under Janet's guidance. As executive director, her role was to do research and get original documents, not relying on newspapers for factual information. She found a way to do it. She didn't drive because of blindness, so she got drivers to take her to meetings. No matter how difficult, every task she undertook, she picked up the hammer and started working on it, with people supporting her. Her drivers were volunteers, spending hours and hours taking her to and from meetings. Some did it for gas money, some for pay.

Sandy Adair is an artist who makes her living today weaving tapestries with mountain scenes on them. Stunning. In the 1980s, she was doing that. She knew artists around Boone, North Carolina and Appalachian State University and elsewhere, and started doing auctions of their donated artwork as fundraisers for BREDL. For another fundraiser, she had artist friends do pen and ink drawings. Six of these drawings were used as covers for note cards that we had printed with BREDL's address on the back side. She sold them. She was very good at getting people to volunteer.

Bob Gessner was assigned to do research and photography. Virginia Hunt did local work but did not stay with BREDL for too long. Ultimately, Sandy and Bob also peeled off after a year or two. We would have staff meetings at Virginia's house. She would cook up a storm, always including something special, like her delicious brownies. If you want people to come to a meeting, feed them well!

We were four different draftees into the anti-nuclear movement and used the special gifts that we had. I started doing research, used the telephone to call all over the country, finding information about what a company had done in other communities. A report produced in 1988 was one of my first for BREDL. I have done a lot ever since then, uncovering facts, putting them in coherent form with footnotes and citations. In the 1980s, I also created video and audio. I have a background in radio and music. I had sound equipment, tape recorders, and video cameras. BREDL produced videos on VHS tape. Some of these are still on shelves in the BREDL headquarters.

We went to Alabama to meet with Kay Kiker. We took the video camera, drove up and down the streets of Emelle, Alabama, capturing images of the boarded up shop windows. The promise of jobs from the chemical waste dump, run by Chemical Waste Management, had never materialized. Their subsidiary Chem Nuclear Systems was why we went.

I interviewed Dolly Burwell, a towering figure in the Environmental Justice movement. She lives in and is from Warren County, North Carolina. She had been arrested fighting the chemical waste dumped in Warren County, which was a starting point of the Environmental Justice movement at the same time that Lois Gibbs was active in Love Canal. My interview of Dolly appears in one of our videos created on an old VHS camera, which I spliced, adding dissolves and fades and cuts, and audio.

Cassettes were the music standard then. I would take a tape recorder, interview someone at a meeting,

edit the audio tape, then use it to produce a short program, 10-15 minutes long. I bought a device that would duplicate six at a time, and sent them to radio stations. The radio stations would play them. We called it Radio Actualities, our own coverage of stories that were unfolding, and the radio stations used much of it.

Before I came to BREDL, I was involved in a performing show band, playing music on stage in venues, clubs, auditoriums, theaters, convention halls. With BREDL, I wrote songs about incinerators and about a site in Wilkes County contaminated by radioactive and hazardous waste dumping. We called these Earth Stage programs. I also did a satire series focusing on environmental issues, called the *Big Throwaway-A Comedy of Global Impact* and *Compost Chef-A Blend of Science and Magic*.

I performed one of my earliest shows at a twenty-state anti-nuclear convention we held in Tennessee, using the Radioactive Money Machine. It had bells and whistles that would sound off during a mock explosion in which the eastern half of the U.S. was wiped off a map, illustrating how the radioactive industry was making money off a radioactive dump, making money off the waste issue. The Radioactive Money Machine gave people attending the convention a break from the serious work they had been doing all day. This type of activism work can become overwhelming, as you know. The people at the convention loved the Radioactive Money Machine.

I got confident enough doing satires that I attended a public hearing of the North Carolina Low-level Radioactive Waste Management Authority, at University of North Carolina in Asheville -- in character. This agency had been set up to find a dump site for low-level radioactive waste. 300 people were in attendance at this meeting which was being held to gather public comments. People wishing to speak at this meeting were asked to sign the sign-up sheet at the entrance to the meeting room. I surreptitiously signed as a made-up character, Dr. Ludwig Smello. This name was a play on one of the nuclear scientists who had invented nuclear weapons, Dr. Victor Tello. I wore a white lab coat, a large red nose, and a hard hat, and carried a large easel pad and a tripod. I waited outside the meeting while others gave comments. Finally, they called on Dr. Smello to give comments. The show was on! I entered with the easel pad, walked to the podium, and did a skit lampooning the credibility of this state agency which had scientists, industry, and business people all sitting at the dais. They didn't stop me, couldn't stop me. I had a skit worked out based on an actual technical report written by one of the members of the agency, titled "Bad is Good, Good is Bad". This report tried to demonstrate how groundwater flow can be both good and bad for the environment. I took that to the bank, used the easel to help deliver the message, "Good is bad, bad is good, down is up, up is down, left is right, right is left, over is under, leftover is in the refrigerator."

After I had done this act, I invited all the members of the authority sitting there, half a dozen individuals, to demonstrate to the audience how safe radioactive waste dump sites would be. I had prepared six cups with smiley faces on them and gave each authority member one of these cups. I took out a thermos bottle full of boiling hot water colored with green food coloring, filled their cups with the steaming hot green water, poured one for myself, and said, "Gentlemen, let's demonstrate to the people in the audience that this water is perfectly safe. I brought it from the Chem Nuclear site in Barnwell, South Carolina. I'm sure you want to demonstrate that this water is perfectly safe to drink."

They looked at me like I had two heads. I put the cup to my lips and asked, "Gentlemen, what's wrong?"

Nobody's drinking." A man in the audience pointed to one of the authority members and said, "He did!" One authority member had actually taken a sip of the green water. I got to know him later, a sweet guy who worked as a local county commissioner in western North Carolina. I had prepared a mock Geiger counter to show that the effects were harmless. It was a cassette tape recorder with white noise on it and a mike that looked like a radiation detection device. It made noise that sounded like a Geiger counter when I would turn the volume up. I walked up to Albert Canipe, the guy who took the sip of green water, and said, "Do you mind if I do a test?" I held the wand close to his belly, then made the noise of the Geiger counter go sky high, so that it looked as if Albert was radioactive. 300 people in the room were on the floor, laughing. The industry people in front couldn't stop me. The whole skit took about 15 minutes.

Janet said the North Carolina Low-level Radioactive Waste Management Authority never came back to western NC after that to do another public hearing.

After this debut of Dr. Smello, I took him on tour. The Radioactive Money Machine was mounted on the back of a trailer on my truck. We took it to town squares, school yards, and parking lots, and would do the Radioactive Money Machine skit for newspapers, TV, radio, local groups, fundraisers. At one point, I had our two youngest children helping me do the skit. Now grown, they remember this activity in great detail. I got them white smocks, called them my consultants, saying they were going to do a study like the state of North Carolina did to site the radioactive dump. The state authority had hired an engineering firm called Dames and Moore to do a geological survey of the state to find a groundwater flow or geology that would be acceptable for building the dump site. The firm developed a map of North Carolina showing grey/blue areas, white areas, and red areas. Dr. Smello performed a parody of that situation. I got the biggest map of North Carolina I could find, six feet wide, and mounted it on a board. As part of the skit, I had this map where everybody could see it. I held up the map of North Carolina and gave each of my consultants water pistols with colored water in them. Two had red food coloring, two had blue food coloring – the colors used in the Dames and Moore map. I asked the "consultants" to do a statewide survey of suitable areas. The children took their pistols and spurted color all over the map. I finished by bragging how little this study cost.

I used to drive all around the state of North Carolina with the props for this skit packed in a camper in the back of the truck. It's tough to say how many times I did this skit, probably 20 to 30, all over North Carolina from west to east. The news media ate it up. It was visually useful to them, told a story.

Dr. Smello also did the Miss Nuclear North Carolina Pageant involving BREDL staffer, Therese Vick. A meeting of the North Carolina Low-level Radioactive Waste Management Authority had been scheduled in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. At this time, the Authority had eliminated all the candidate sites for the nuclear waste dump except for two, and they were scheduled to make the final selection at this meeting. The two sites that the Authority was considering included one in Hamlet, in the Sandhills region of North Carolina, and one in Apex, North Carolina, near Raleigh, an area where the predominant geological formations are underground structures called diabase dikes.

We used this meeting as an opportunity for another skit, one which we called the Miss Nuclear North Carolina Pageant. The rule of this beauty pageant was that the loser would go on to the final competition, inverting the whole concept. We staged our beauty pageant on the back of my truck. Our

pageant had two contenders. One was Miss Sandy Hill from the Hamlet area, played by BREDL staffer Therese Vick. She showed up in a resplendent purple sequined gown, purple eye shadow to the nth degree, looking every bit like a beauty contestant. The other contestant in our pageant was played by an activist named Matt, from Apex, North Carolina. He came dressed like a ballerina, in a pink tutu and leotards, and a huge blonde wig. His name for the pageant was Miss Diabase Dike. He played the role admirably.

After enacting our pageant for the media, we decided to walk into the hotel where the Authority's meeting was being held. As Pageant moderator, I still had my clown nose, white coat, and polka dot tie on, and was smoking a cigar. Therese and Matt entered in their Pageant costumes. We walked right in like we were there to hear the proceedings, paraded down the middle of auditorium, slowly, looking for seats in the front row. You could have heard a pin drop. We totally stole the show, it rattled their cage.

The Authority's meeting continued for a second day. The night before, we held a citizens' meeting in a local bar, brainstorming, debriefing our skit. Someone at the meeting had an idea, saying, "Let's do something completely different." The plan was for everyone to pull a dollar bill out of their pocket and wave it when the authority made its final vote on the location of the nuclear waste dump site. The next day, everybody had a dollar bill in their pocket. There was a series of votes, and when each vote happened, everybody in the audience started waving dollar bills. Paper money being waved in the air by 50 to 100 anti-nuclear activists was actually audible – you could hear it swish-swish-swish.

The upshot is, we've continued to use those tactics. In April 2017, we travelled 1,000 miles through areas crossed by the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Mountain Valley Pipeline, pulling with us a mock natural gas compressor station. It made smoke with a smoke machine, and played noise that was a recording of an actual compressor station that was given to us by a community in Pennsylvania. We used a guitar amplifier to raise the volume to 90-95 decibels, a deafening racket. It created a focal point, something visual and tangible to see and hear, in order to make it more real. Before that the idea of a compressor station was an abstract concept. Here's the demo – hold your ears!

The use of parody is not just for hijinks or comic relief. It is to build confidence and solidarity based on common understandings and symbols. That's what agit-prop does, a technique I learned while studying *comedia del arte* with people like Leo Bassi, who masterfully used parody to make fun of Mussolini, the early 20th century fascist dictator in Italy. Pete Hill, an early mentor for BREDL, would ask, how do you want the future to look? How are we portrayed when out in public? Dour and scornful, victimized? What is the image we want to show? Being negative and victimized doesn't draw people. It's better to portray a real sense of confidence and leadership based on the assumption that you are going to win either because you are right or you outnumber the opposition through your activism. People are drawn to success, not failure. As a community organizer, you teach that right away. We can't build on loss. A citizens' campaign should have its first activity end in victory. This first victory allows you to move onto something a bit more challenging, then something even more challenging. Whether stopping a waste dump or reversing global warming, this is not just hijinks, and it doesn't take away from having the science behind you.

I still have boxes of documents in the basement that Janet got sent to her by U.S. Dept. of Energy during the nuclear campaigns, boxes of binders with maps, tech journals. She read every bit of that stuff, and

we were armed with facts. Landfills leak invariably – fact. There is no safe level of exposure to radiation – fact.

BREDL's first fight was to stop the federal high level waste dump site for radioactive fuel rods. Between 1984 and 1988, our campaign was to defend the Blue Ridge at first, then all of North Carolina, then all of the southeastern U.S. We had a big meeting in Maryville, Tennessee that brought activists from 22 southeastern states. This was a campaign to stop the planning of a nuclear dump under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which had been passed in 1982. This federal law had designated two waste sites, one in the eastern U.S. and one in the west, for deposition of irradiated nuclear fuel rods. For the eastern site, they had narrowed it down to 12 different suitable areas, one of which was 20 miles from my home. That's how I came to BREDL. We worked with people from all of the targeted places. A 501(c)4 nonprofit called Southern Environmental Network sent a lobbyist to Washington and got the Nuclear Waste Policy Act changed. This change occurred because of the political press from all over the country. The resulting Nuclear Waste Policy Act amendments were made in 1987 because of political pressure and national outcry. Congress took the eastern site off the drawing board using a political tactic. In the same bill, they determined that only one site would be necessary, and that would be in Nevada, which had a weak delegation in Congress. That bill, which we named the "Screw Nevada Bill", eliminated 12 candidate sites in the eastern U.S. This was our first victory, but we did not stop there. We continued to work to stop it from going to the site in Nevada at Yucca Mountain, owned by the Shoshone Tribe. We worked from 1994 to 2002 to stop the Yucca Mountain waste dump, with the motto "not here, not there, not anywhere".

The Yucca Mountain site was removed from consideration as a nuclear dump site by the Obama Administration Dept. of Energy and EPA. It got put back on the list for a while, but since has been removed from consideration once again. There will be another campaign in the future.

Then we fought the siting of the low-level radioactive waste dump site. At the same time as the low-level radioactive waste dump fight, we got involved in fighting a multi-state hazardous waste incinerator. They were doing the same kind of search process as we saw for the low-level nuclear waste dump. That's how we got to know Therese Vick. The difference between one campaign and the next was the technical facts, millirems of radiation vs. ppb of benzene, for example. But underlying both the nuclear dump and hazardous waste incinerator was the fact that they were huge waste sites. Whether you are fighting a solid waste dump, a coal-fired power plant, an asphalt plant, a chicken manure burner, a pipeline, or a compressor station, you need to develop a campaign which focuses a community's power. It is about power. Bob Bullard writes about that in his book, *Dumping in Dixie*, which describes waste deposition by zip codes, a political process that determines where noxious facilities end up. We saw this with the environmental injustice of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. It was no accident that the compressor had been planned for construction in an African American community. A successful campaign shows elected officials and government authorities that they've got trouble, there is growing opposition in the public sphere to what they are trying to do.

Interviewer: *Is social distancing having an effect on BREDL's ability to organize?*

Lou: That's a good question. It had an impact on our ability to organize during the last year or so. But I think as I'm stepping down, that these changes were already underway. Why drive your truck or vehicle

300 miles, then drive back, if you could do it on video screen with audio connection and accomplish it without carbon dioxide. What we learned over the past year is that there are some things you can do that way by virtual presence, but there are difficult factors that need to be taken into account. For example, as a BREDL organizer, you often find yourself walking into a room of people organized by community leaders with whom you had previously spoken over the phone. You walk into a room of three dozen people, introduce yourself or get introduced as an organizer with BREDL to talk with the group today. In this situation, you get out a planning pad, marker, and start asking questions. What are your goals? What is your experience so far? Why are you here today? What is your name? You go around the room in that fashion and write their responses on the planning pad. After an hour or two, you have developed a level of trust and credibility with this group of strangers. After you walk out of the meeting, those in attendance hang out for what I call the parking lot meeting. People have a lot of questions that were prompted by the meeting. This parking lot meeting is where they are getting their questions answered. It's what we've done for 30-some years. If you want to do that with Zoom or Microsoft Team, or Skype, we've done it with a virtual planning pad and other analogous tools for the virtual presence. You can see and hear each other virtually, but what I have found is that level of trust, credibility, is much harder to accomplish with the virtual presence, because it lacks the feel, commitment, warmth, human contact, facial expressions, body language, and ability to inspire. Virtual works up to a measure but doesn't match being in the room with people.

But the move toward virtual was already underway before the start of the COVID pandemic. We've offered virtual attendance at board meetings for the past five years. During the past year with the pandemic, we had to do something, so that's what we have done. But that is its weak point. The question in the future is, how much to do virtually and when to do it. My thinking is that, after the last year and a half that, yes, physical meetings will still be necessary, at least at the beginning of each new chapter's involvement. That first meeting should be done live, in person. Then during your second, third, or sixteenth meeting, you will have that foundation to build on. You'll know each other's names and capabilities, and your subsequent meetings can have a virtual presence and reduced carbon footprint.

However, the virtual presence is totally insufficient in some areas BREDL works in – Shell Bluff, Georgia; Pamplico, South Carolina; Sanford, North Carolina; Bent Mountain, Virginia, where people don't have broadband to be able to use a Zoom platform. Even if they can subscribe, video won't work because they don't have bandwidth in this part of the county. Those areas with poor or lacking internet capability are the very places that end up with the waste dumps, smoke stacks, pipelines. We can't use the internet in some of the places we need it the most. For example, in Pamplico, where we began working last year, getting a handwritten petition with 118 signatures took 18 months, using telephone and conference calls. Telephone can be a sadly inadequate medium for community organizing.

Interviewer: *What is the value of the element of surprise in campaigns undertaken by BREDL chapters?*

Lou: Janet had a strong belief in the value of the element of surprise. Surprise is necessary for politics, baseball games, and many other things in order to prevail over an opponent. Our method is to make a list of activities you are working on in your environmental campaign, such as a petition, letters to the editor, community meetings, making comments to the air board or water board, posting on Facebook, Instagram, etc. All are good and necessary, but if you want to win, you must surprise your opponent, do

something they are not ready for.

At the early stages of the public participation process for the Mountain Valley Pipeline, the pipeline company representatives were taking people making public comments into a private room to give their comments. This took away the public rallying effect of those comments. When we would attend public hearings in the past, we would turn the podium around and address the audience, not the hearing officer in the front of the room. It's absolutely necessary to do something unexpected to win. You've got to be creative and come up with new ideas. The element of surprise is key to winning, and campaigns have been lost through failure to use surprise. Groups that were adverse to the surprise element felt compelled to tell officials what they were going to do, felt they had to act within accepted modes of operation, having your three minutes, not doing things that would surprise anybody. One woman said, "I don't like what you are saying." That group lost their campaign. I'm still learning, but. People who think they know everything about organizing a campaign, based on false shibboleths that don't serve a dynamic community campaign – hoary concepts going unquestioned, learn too late if at all.

Interviewer: *Is BREDL unique in the world of nonprofits?*

Lou: I don't think BREDL is unique. I think BREDL is unusual, but I have seen other groups that have a similar approach. There's not many, however. I know they exist because I've seen their results. They may not use exactly the same approach as BREDL, but something similar. This formula for citizens action has a long tradition and could be adapted environmental work, labor work, civil rights work, so I don't think we're unique. I'm thankful for that. The world needs more unusual organizations like BREDL. BREDL needs to be retained in its approach and philosophy because one of the things established by the first BREDL board of directors was the chapter-based structure, which makes best use of local talent and encourages autonomy and freedom of action. Chapters get certain benefits and have responsibilities for governance of the BREDL organization. The chapters keep us tethered to the group, keeps our feet flat on the ground, so we don't get away with things like helping to decide where a noxious incinerator should go. Or making it a little less noxious by developing new regulations that are a little stricter than the old ones. When push comes to shove, we take an idealistic position that draws people and focuses the community power, power which the community has even if it doesn't know it has it.

The problem with waste dumps in particular and other issues as well is the profit motive. This is a standard that I use all the time. If you want more of something, then private enterprise is the way to go. More ball point pens. If you want less of something, the profit motive conflicts with it. If you want less household trash, less waste going to landfills, then having commercial landfills is anathema to your goal, because a company can make more money the more waste there is.

That's why we oppose commercial enterprise for management of municipal solid waste, for example.

Is BREDL unique? No, but we do work with groups that have a similar approach, and groups that don't. The Radioactive Waste Roundtable was a very loose knit coalition, composed of players from targeted communities who were interested in the radioactive dump site campaign, as well as groups that were statewide in nature, and others as well. We all worked together and planned a common strategy. But there are other groups in other states and countries that have a similar approach. We know them firsthand. We made environmentalist friends from all over Russia, for example. We visited them and

they visited us in North Carolina. We shared a lot of the same philosophy. They had a track record to show for it. In the case of Russia, some of our cohorts there were actually involved in bringing about the end of the Soviet Union.

We attended a hearing on Chernobyl in Saratov, Russia, on the Volga River, organized by our friend, Olga Pitsunova. We spent several days there working with our friends, Russian, British, French, and other nationalities. During the hearing, an official was given the podium. He started out saying he was not prepared to speak, had not had time to prepare. Olga then stood up and said, "You lie. We gave you months to prepare for this meeting." At that point I turned to Janet and remarked that things had really changed in this country. The seeds planted in that campaign went on. We worked with them on the plutonium fuel issue that I mentioned earlier. When our Russian friends came to North Carolina to visit us, we took them to see the plants that would have used plutonium, just as they had done for us in Russia.

Interviewer: *Can you tell us about BREDL's mock nuclear cask?*

Lou: The mock nuclear cask is an imitation of an actual canister which the industry uses to transport irradiated fuel rods after they have been in a reactor for about three years. The rods get so radioactive and hot in temperature, they have to be removed from the nuclear power plant. Even though they have been used to heat water for a period of time, they become waste material with uranium in them. The G-9 is one of the canisters the industry uses for this purpose. It's actually lined with lead and stainless steel to physically isolate the rod. It's 18 or 19 feet long, dumbbell shaped because the fuel rod is in the long horizontal part, and the circles on the end are like bumpers. BREDL's mock-up is the same size as the actual, and is made of fiberglass and mounted on a twin-axle trailer. We got it from friends to use in a campaign in 1994 fighting against nuclear power plants' plans to ship radioactive waste on highways to Nevada. From 1994 to 2002, we did a lot of radioactive waste road shows using the mock cask as a backdrop or photo opportunity.

Folks in Nevada had built the mock cask years earlier and said they no longer needed it. We were at a meeting in Washington DC where one of the leaders of the Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force said, "If you want it, you can have it." My daughter and I drove to Nevada in a pickup truck. The trip took two days. We went to the yard where the cask was parked, hitched it up to the truck, and drove back to North Carolina. We started using it in 1995 as part of a campaign to end the nuclear age, commemorating the 50-year anniversary of the bombing of Japan. We worked with friends in Washington, Texas, Nevada, New Mexico, had a caravan which we led with my pickup truck. The cask was pulled in tandem with the motor home-based Museum of the Nuclear Age, which had been created by a woman from Texas. So the caravan consisted of the cask behind my truck and this motor home converted to a museum, painted bright blue. The museum contained artifacts, photographs, illustrations of the history of atomic energy going back to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was 30 foot long. Our caravan started at the Trinity test site in New Mexico where the first nuclear bomb was detonated on July 15, 1945. We met on July 14, 1995 at the Trinity test site to witness and kick off the campaign. After that we took the caravan from town to town in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Tennessee, all across the southeastern U.S., including North Carolina and Washington, DC. The tour ended on the Hiroshima Nagasaki Memorial Day on August 8, 1995.

While on I-40 in Texas, we hit one of the storms the locals call a "blue norther". The wind was real bad, so I had to pull over and park for 45 minutes for the storm to blow over. True to its name, the sky turned blue during this storm.

The caravan was a great experience for Janet and me. We met a lot of people and held many press conferences. We stayed in people's homes, not once in a motel. Our final stop was at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. All of the planning and networking for this trip was by paper, telephone, and fax machines, as the internet had not yet become the overriding means of communication. We tried to have a press release every day along the route from St. Louis to Oklahoma City to places in New Mexico, tiny towns, state capitols, organizing all along the route.

Later, BREDL staffers Bonnie and Claude helped with hauling the cask, towing it behind their motor home. They took it as far west as Iowa, then back to New England, with many stops in between.

We did a road show about foreign research reactor fuel. I took the cask and we worked with a chapter in Wilmington, North Carolina led by Ron Shackelford. We did a Don't Waste North Carolina and South Carolina tour. In Wilmington, we were parked on a paved public landing area across the Cape Fear River from where the battleship USS North Carolina is parked at the World War II Memorial. We got permission from the city to hold a press conference. We parked the cask there with signs on it. While getting it set up, a high-ranking naval officer came by and said we couldn't park the cask there. Ron told him we had a permit. The officer said, "I don't care. You're not allowed to park it here." I said ok, I'll be right back, officer. I started walking away and walked into town. I went to a coffee shop, bought a cup of coffee and a donut, got a table, and sat down to drink the coffee and eat the donut. I waited about 45 minutes, then walked back down to where the press conference was scheduled to be held. By then, TV news cameras were set up for the press conference. Nobody besides me had keys to my truck to move it. The Naval officer was standing there fuming because nobody had keys to move my truck. By the time I got back from the coffee shop, the news media had arrived, and everybody knew we weren't going anywhere, so we were able to have our press conference as planned. Janet was witness to the whole thing.

Charles Utley drove the cask to areas around Augusta, Georgia.

My stepson, Ballard and I drove it to Washington, DC for a press conference. We were working with national groups again. The Nuclear Information Resource Service had set up the press conference to take place on Pennsylvania Ave. in downtown DC. It was during the late 1990s. We brought the cask up to DC and parked it on the center lane of Pennsylvania Ave., which is a paved median in the middle of Pennsylvania Ave. that's not a turn lane, halfway between the White House and the Capitol Building. Our partner group had gotten permission from the Capitol Police to do this. Ballard got real worried because, unbeknownst to me, he had purchased a stink bomb and stashed it in the glove department of the truck. He was afraid that the capitol police would find it and arrest him. He later confided that he was really scared. But the press conference went on without incident. We put the cask on the back of the truck and drove around the Capitol Building. Constitution, First and Independence Avenues make a tight circle around the block. Ballard was handing out flyers every time we would stop, going clockwise around the building. He was really good at it. I don't know if you can do that anymore after 9-11.