

A CELEBRATION AND APPRECIATION OF THE ALLIANCE'S ORIGINS OF GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

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By [Snake River Alliance](#)



By Kathy Daly & Kaye Turner

What were the early days of Snake River Alliance like, down in the corner pocket of Southeast Idaho? Well, in those nascent days, we were pretty much a herd of wild-ass hippies who had grown up hiding under our school desks in response to imminent nuclear threat. Then as young adults we realized that same nuclear threat was being injected into our aquifer.

Word was there was an organization called Snake River Alliance coming to the forefront to protect the aquifer, but “they” were vilified as a group of not just naysayers, but loose cannons. The negative feelings were understandable since many Southeast Idahoans depended on the INL site for their livelihood. Then along came Beatrice Brailsford in all of her diplomatic, scholarly, thoughtful, intelligent, yet down-home Idaho manner. It would be many, many years before the Department of Energy and the Idaho National Lab fully grasped what had hit them!

From our point of view, she drew us in, educated us, and raised a community of caring advocates and activists. And as we say, considering the ruffians she had to start with, this wasn't an overnight endeavor!

Our first major hurdle was the SIS. The Special Isotope Separator. It was to be built on the beautiful high desert to our north. Its purpose was to produce weapons-grade plutonium. Well, that thought didn't sit well with the wild ass hippies!! It was this challenge that transformed our motley crew into articulate, fine tuned speakers. We found ourselves giving testimony at DOE hearings, a daunting experience indeed. The auditorium in Idaho Falls was filled beyond capacity for the SIS hearing. There was a sea of INL employees packing the house. Though Snake River Alliance members showed up in force, we were overwhelmingly outnumbered by site workers.

Tim Norton recalls one young fellow testifying that night who described himself as an ex-military man. He told the crowd that he was ashamed of the way the Snake River Alliance was being treated . . . saying that no one should be called unpatriotic for exercising their democratic rights, and participating in the governmental process.

When the SIS went down in defeat, it was an epiphany for many of us . . . that truly one voice CAN make a difference! "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead. Beatrice printed that Margaret Mead quote on bright turquoise cards and placed them on the tables at every Pocatello SRA dinner. She made us believers!

The next thing you know we were off to Washington for DC Days, and soaking up the national grassroots scene with cohorts from the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability. These days the ANA loves to come to southeast Idaho to hold their annual meetings. Over the years we've stood on the Benton Street overpass bearing witness to the casks of nuclear waste rumbling northward by rail through our community. Oft times this would be a middle of the night affair, in the bitterest of cold and wind chill. Only the stalwart need apply!

In warmer weather we've honored the remembrance of Hiroshima with outdoor picnics. In the fall we have our wonderful community dinners, always with enlightening guest speakers like Arjun Makajani, Liz Paul, and Tom Carpenter to name a few. One year, Margo Proksa spearheaded a project where we created an enormous papier mache globe, studded with 22,000 farmers matches representing all of the nuclear warheads on our planet. By that point in time our local media had begun to realize that Snake River Alliance wasn't a mere flash in the pan, and began to cover many of our events.

These days there are tours of the INL with Snake River Alliance being welcomed and well received. We attribute this to our fearless Beatrice. Her masterful understanding of not only the science, but the politics of DOE, INL , and the nuclear complex is beyond compare. Her respect for the site employees, and their expertise and knowledge has in turn gained her their respect. It has gained the Snake River Alliance a share of respect that was not evident in the past. Knowing Beatrice, she wouldn't take all the credit.

She'd attribute it to all of us – her grassroots activists, the environmental wild-ass hippies, now in their 60s and 70s!