The Middle Column

The Power of Love Overcomes the Love for Power

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The History Behind Love Canal.

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Gibbs’s Struggling Fight for Environmental Protection.

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The Power of Love Overcomes the Love for Power

From the land on the Rainbow Bridge to the water on the Maid of the Mist, it is no surprise that Niagara Falls was a natural wonder of the world. Features rich in these areas make it difficult to believe Niagara Falls has kept a hidden secret, buried under the grounds of one of its neighborhoods, Love Canal. In the 1970s, it was discovered that tons of toxic waste lurked beneath these beautiful acres, which led to severe health effects and anomalies among the citizens. With the land under the ownership of Hooker Chemical Company, citizens felt it was futile to fight against the power of a dominant corporation. In the words of Washington Irving, “Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune; but great minds rise above them.” One of those great minds was a local mother by the name of Lois Gibbs. Gibbs stood on the edge, leading her community into battle against the power of the chemical corporation. Once the boundaries were broken, more than 200 families evacuated the neighborhood. In addition, lawsuits against Hooker Chemical were filed. Lois Gibbs has been a national icon for her actions, which resulted in the creation of laws that aim to collect taxes from chemical corporations. These taxes are then used to clean up hazardous sites.

The Fight Continues

Gibbs fought a more years until Jimmy Carter delivered an emergency declaration, moving families out of the area. In 1978, Congress enacted Superfund legislation in order to clean up other toxic waste sites in the nation. After Love Canal, Gibbs received thousands of calls from people around the nation also facing environmental hazards. In order to help other people, she established the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ).

Road to Saving Neighbors and Nature

In the mid-1970s, Lois Gibbs moved to Love Canal with her husband and two infant children. She wanted to live near the Niagara River, hoping to experience a scenic and working-class neighborhood. Her husband went to work, while she became a stay-at-home mom. In 1976, Gibbs was puzzled by the series of illnesses that hospitalized her children weekly. On April of the same year, Niagara Gazette reporter Michael Brown wrote a series on hazardous waste problems in Love Canal. Lois learned that her children’s school was located over the toxic waste. Although she begged the school board to transfer her children, they denied her request but made her feel that every child would want the same privilege as well. Gibbs was more determined to fight against a dominant corporation. This was the first time Gibbs focused on environmental issues. With no experience, the government did not take her seriously in 1976. That is why they refused to clean up the neighborhood or relocate the citizens. With her refusal to give up, Gibbs organized her neighbors to start the Love Canal Homeowners Association.

“What we’ve done here today, will look like a Sesame Street picnic compared to what we’ll do then.” • Lois Gibbs