



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

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“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Some Legislative and Regulatory Issues About Depleted Uranium

Peter Aronson

Humboldt Bay Chapter 56 VFP

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Depleted Uranium (DU) is a waste product from the process of enriching (concentrating) natural uranium (U) used for nuclear weapons and nuclear power reactors.

Natural U contains two predominant forms, called isotopes. About 99.3% is U238 and about 0.7% is U235. When U235 is extracted and concentrated for nuclear fuel and weapons the remaining product is DU (depleted of U235). U235 is far more radioactive than U238.

All forms of U are highly regulated due to known human and environmental dangers related to their inherent properties. U, including DU, is both a toxic heavy metal and a radioactive agent.

It is illegal to mine, manufacture, possess, transport, store, or sell U without layers of oversight and control by the Dept of Energy, the U.S. body responsible for considering applications and license for commercial or military use.

Beyond the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), multiple Geneva Conventions, and international treaties, the DOE, NRC, OSHA, Atomic Energy Commission, EPA, DHS and a huge array of state, national, and international standards, protocols, Acts, and agreements govern the enormous set of guidelines and laws to regulate Uranium.

Without such regulation and control the consequence of the use of U on the health and safety to humans and the environment would be left to the ‘give and take’ between special interests and public interests, specifically public and environmental health and welfare. As with the nuclear industry, the long-term consequences of DU use to the environment and human health may be subordinated in favor of short-term gains.

DU is considered a Class A low-level waste by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. As such it must be contained – an important and expensive liability. In 2002 250,000 metric tons of DU waste (tailings) were collected in the U.S. Today there are ~700,000 metric tons to deal with by corporations contracted with/by the DOE.

DU has been used by the military to make bunker-buster bombs, tank armor, and armor penetrating munitions. The DOD gets it for very low cost, or free, from the DOE – a tidy arrangement.

Decades of research from government-contracted studies more than suggest there are harmful effects from exposures received from close encounters with DU, especially those inhaled [see end notes]. Epidemiological data, which unequivocally define DU as the source of genetic damage and cancers, are lacking in part due to minimal efforts by the Pentagon to properly assess and test soldiers with potential or likely exposures.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1996 session) condemned weaponry containing depleted uranium as a weapon of mass destruction both against members of the armed forces and against civilian populations. The Commission spoke of these weapons not only as resulting in death, misery and disability, but also they were concerned about the long-term consequences on human life and the environment.

According to 3 GAO studies in the ‘90s, military regulations mandating pre-deployment safety training and post-deployment testing were mostly ignored. The only DU testing facility in the nation admits it’s testing procedure cannot differentiate DU from background radiation at the very levels that produce a positive test (1). Consequently, the “negative” test results permit statements used by our government such as

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this, “As far as we know DU munitions are safe”, thereby condoning their continued use.

Statements concluding DU is safe are less scientific than political, especially given the known hazards from U properties that create the layers of safety regulations in current operation (see end notes).

Legislative efforts to better and further study human and environmental health risks to combatants, non-combatants, and the environment exposed to DU have been attempted at the federal level, where it belongs. Due to U.S. Congressional inaction, there have been several state legislative actions.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

In the past decade most sessions of the U.S. Congress produced bills to investigate potential health and environmental effects of the military use of DU, or called for further studies to test veterans and active duty soldiers for exposure to DU during their service.

The outcome was and remains the same – these bills do not make it to the committees, or subcommittees to hear them. In every case they die due to lack of action. Federal DU bills have never realized the democratic process of debate or deliberation on their merits, so no vote was ever taken on the health and safety of DU munitions on our military, NATO troops, the environment, or innocent civilians who are exposed without their consent or knowledge.

The following examples summarize some of the federal legislation to date, beginning with the most recent.

1. H.R. 248: Depleted Uranium Screening and Testing Act

Sponsor: Rep. José Serrano [D-NY16] Introduced in Congress: Jan 7, 2011. Introduced in Congress: Jan 7, 2011.

To provide for identification of members of the Armed Forces exposed during military service to depleted uranium, to provide for health testing of such members, and for other purposes.

2. H.R.207 : Depleted Uranium Screening and Testing Act

Sponsor: Rep Serrano, Jose E. [NY-16] (introduced 1/4/2007) Cosponsors (16)

Status: Referred to the Subcommittee

A bill To provide for identification of members of the Armed Forces exposed during military service to depleted uranium, to provide for health testing of such members, and for other purposes.

3. H.R.202 Depleted Uranium Screening and Testing Act of 2005

Sponsor: Rep Serrano, Jose E. [NY-16] (introduced 1/4/2005) Cosponsors (17)

Latest Major Action: 2/4/2005 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

To provide for identification of members of the Armed Forces exposed during military service to depleted uranium, to provide for health testing of such members, and for other purposes.

4. H.R.1483 external link “Depleted Uranium Munitions Study Act of 2003

Introduced March 27, 2003, Rep Jim McDermott external link

To require certain studies regarding the health effects of exposure to depleted uranium munitions, to require the cleanup and mitigation of depleted uranium contamination at sites of depleted uranium munitions use and production in the United States, and for other purposes.

5. H.R.3155 Depleted Uranium Munitions Suspension and Study Act of 2001 (10/17/2001) Cosponsors (5)

Latest Major Action: 1/28/2002 House committee/subcommittee actions. Status: Executive Comment Requested from DOD. Bill introduced in U.S. House to study DU weapons’ health and environmental effects and to require cleanup of DU-contaminated sites in the U.S.

Sponsor: Rep McKinney, Cynthia A. [GA-4] (introduced

STATE LEGISLATION

Overwhelming political pressure to prevent these bills from advancing and the lack of political will at the federal level led 10 states to develop their own laws in response to a decade of inaction relating to DU weapons and their potential impact on the health and safety of our military service members, noncombatants, and the environment.

Because these issues need to be addressed at the national level, these laws had little clout, however well intended. Most state legislation had similar language and intent. None would have passed if costs to the state were involved. All sought to assist service members potentially exposed to access the DVA DU Testing Program, the one active Army regulations call for but are ignored.

The following states now have state laws to identify eligible service members and assist them in accessing federal testing : LA.; CT.; UT.; CA.; WA.; IL., WI.

Here in CA. VFP Chapter 56, Humboldt Bay Chapter worked with then Senator Wesley Chesbro, who sponsored the bill, SB 1720. It passed and is called the “Veterans Health and Safety Act of



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2006". Its purpose is "safeguard the health of California's veterans by assisting them in obtaining federal treatment services, including best practice health screening tests capable of detecting low levels of depleted uranium."

Realizing the DVA was not using the best testing methods, specific language that called for a "best practice" test for DU that is a more precise test. Many states used similar language in their bills for the same reason. The reality is the states have no power to implement or insist on use of the "best test".

The objective of efforts by the states was to give unsuspecting members of the armed forces a heads up about potential exposures during their service, and improve access to testing.

This Act requires the CA Dept of Veterans Affairs to communicate the intent of this law to eligible service members, but this was 'implemented' by producing a single page piece of paper that is available in each CDVA office in the state. They feel their mission of outreach was accomplished by this action, and are done with it.

AS with all state "DU legislation", it is largely ceremonial. The intent of the states was to give the 'heads up' about potential exposures to (more) toxic agents during service to their country. The same heads up the GAO told the Pentagon 3 times – that those potentially exposed did not receive safety training, do not know how they might be exposed, nor that they can be tested if they ask. To this day, most Gulf War vets don't know the answer to these questions.

State legislation has had little impact on these questions.

Federal legislation is crushed by the powers-that-be, crushing the democratic process in its wake.

END NOTES

1. U.S. Army Medical Command, "Medical Management of Army Personnel Exposed to Depleted Uranium (DU)," 5 March 2005.

2. "Poison" is defined in the Air Force manual AFP 110-31 in a way that clearly describes properties of DU munitions when they hit a hard target.

"Poisons are biological or chemical substances causing death or disability with permanent effects, in even small quantities they are ingested, enter the lungs or bloodstream, or through the skin."

3. Ammunition made from DU is "radioactive material" by NRC definition DU munitions are deployed to the target by a conventional explosive. The Department of Homeland Security and NRC define a "dirty bomb" as follows:

"A 'dirty bomb' is one type of a radiological dispersal device (RDD) that combines a conventional explosive, such as dynamite, with radioactive material."

DU munitions meet the NRC & DHS definition of a "dirty bomb", yet are classified as "conventional weapons". One can imagine how this definition would be applied if NATO forces were on the receiving end of "dirty bombs".

4. "If depleted uranium enters the body, it has a potential to generate significant medical consequences. The risks associated with depleted uranium are both chemical and radiological."

Army Environmental Policy Institute (AEPI), 1995

5. "Inhaled insoluble oxides stay in the lungs longer and pose a potential cancer risk due to radiation. Ingested DU dust can also pose a radioactive and a toxicity risk."

1993 – U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), Operation Desert Storm: Army Not Adequately Prepared to Deal With Depleted Uranium Contamination, (GAO/NSIAD-93-90), Jan 1993, pp 17-18.

6. "Aerosol DU exposures to soldiers on the battlefield could be significant with potential radiological & toxicological effects."

U.S. Army Armament, Munitions & Chemical Command report, Kinetic Energy Penetrator Long Term Strategy Study, July 1990.

7. "US service personnel also could have been exposed to DU if they inhaled or ingested DU dust particles during incidental contact with vehicles destroyed by DU munitions, or if they lived or worked in areas contaminated with DU dust from accidental munitions fires. Thus, unnecessary exposure of many individuals could have occurred."

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held on Thursday, January 5th at 7:00 PM. Meeting will be held in the Commons Room at 550 Union Street in Arcata. Veterans and non-veterans are more than welcome to come and help us dialogue about what we together can do to bring about peace in this complex world.



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Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses, Final Report, Dec 1996, p.99.

8. "Personnel in or near (less than 50m) an armored vehicle at the time these vehicles were struck by DU munitions could receive significant internal DU Exposures (i.e. those in excess of allowable standards)."

Col. Eric Daxon, Radiation Protection Staff Officer, US Army Medical Command, summarizing results of a Dec 1989 report from the Ballistic Research Laboratory, Radiological Contamination From Impacted Abrams Heavy Armor. Flisar, et.al.

9. "Depleted Uranium is more of a problem than we thought when it was developed. But it was developed according to standards & was thought through very carefully. It turned out perhaps to be wrong."

Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advisor to President Bush, from an executive summary: Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, 2004 Report & Recommendations.

This Rich's last week in D.C. -- on the ROCK as Rich calls Freedom Plaza.

By Gay Lou Gulchrist

These two months have seen important bills passed in Congress, one more being the Payroll Tax and Unemployment bill which if not voted upon in the Senate today will be tomorrow because our congress men and women need to get out of town -- if they are to meet their limited number of hours needed to serve out their job each year, month, and week. Personally, I hope the Democrats just let the bill die rather than accept all of the poison pills that have been inserted into its poor body. Our Rep Thompson, I believe, has voted against this bill as well as the Military Appropriations bill which also had a poison bill. According to Thompson's Eureka office, he voted against the appropriations bill in order to deny \$\$\$ for Afghanistan. However, with the help of a few Dems, both bills passed the House.

It has been a momentous two months for Rich, and I imagine he will need some time to adjust to life almost completely surrounded by citizens who are to say it kindly, 'naive'. He will be glad to be among the Humboldt County Vets for Peace. We will visit offspring for the holidays and I'm not quite sure when we will return.

No Speedy Trial for Manning; Now in Pre-Trial Confinement for 560 Day

***3 of 34 Arrested for Protesting Manning's Quantico Pre-Trial Conditions Found Guilty of Obstruction of Traffic-
\$15 Fine
by Ann Wright***

Five months ago, on April 22, 2011, over 400 citizens converged on Quantico Marine Base to protest the pre-trial conditions of alleged Wikileaks whistleblower US Army Private First Class Bradley Manning. Manning was arrested on May 26, 2010, on a U.S. military base in Iraq on suspicion of giving classified material to the website WikiLeaks.

No Speedy Trial-Manning still in pre-trial confinement after 560 days

Manning still is in pre-trial confinement, 560 days after he was arrested.

Manning was charged on July 5, 2010, with transferring classified materials on his personal computer, and communicating national defense information to an unauthorized source. An additional 22 charges were added on March 1, 2011, including wrongfully obtaining classified material for the purpose of posting it on the Internet knowing that the information would be accessed by the enemy; the illegal transmission of defense information; fraud; and aiding the enemy. In April, 2011, he was found fit to face a court martial and currently awaits the first hearing.

Conditions during pre-trial confinement at Quantico Marine Base

Bradley ManningBradley ManningAs soon as he was transferred from Kuwait to the Marine Corps Brig at Quantico, Virginia in July 29, 2010, Manning was held in solitary confinement and forced nudity. He was classified as a "maximum custody detainee" and held under a "Prevention of Injury" designation for nine months until he was transferred in April 2011. A Prevention of Injury order is just short of suicide watch and means that guards check the cell every five minutes with the prisoner not allowed to sleep during the day. Manning was not allowed to sleep between 5 am (7 am at weekends) and 8 pm, and if he tried to, was made to stand or sit up. At Quantico he was detained in a 6 x 12 foot cell, with no window, and only a bed, toilet and sink. He ate his meals in his cell. Manning could walk outside his cell only while shackled and for only one hour. He was allowed to keep only one book and one magazine in his cell.

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He was required to remain visible to the guards at all times, including at night, which meant that he had no sheets and no pillow except one built into his mattress. Until March, 2011 he was required to sleep in boxer shorts, and had experienced chafing of the skin from the heavy blanket which was designed so it could not be shredded. On March 2, 2011, Manning was informed that an Article 138 complaint filed in January by his lawyer, that requested that he be removed from maximum custody and prevention-of-injury watch, had been denied. This resulted in him being required to sleep without clothing and present himself naked outside his cell for morning inspection, which his lawyer described as ritual humiliation. From March 10 onwards he was given a wrap-around smock with Velcro fasteners to sleep in. In response to the incident, the brig psychiatrist classified him as at "low risk of suicide."

Public outcry against conditions of Manning's confinement

Amnesty International called the conditions "harsh and punitive." In April, 2011, 295 scholars, including legal scholars and philosophers signed a letter saying the conditions the Marines kept Manning in amounted to a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

In March, 2011, State Department spokesperson and retired US Air Force Colonel P.J. Crowley resigned from his government position after he stated, "What is being done to Bradley Manning is ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid on the part of the department of defense." Crowley's statement forced President Obama to address for the first time the issue of Manning's handling at Quantico marine base in Virginia. Obama defended the way Manning is being treated, saying he had been reassured by the Pentagon that his confinement was appropriate.

President Obama has prejudiced the case against Manning by his statement that Manning "broke the law." At a fundraiser in San Francisco, California in April, 2011, in a video recording, Obama responded to a questioner, "I can't conduct diplomacy on an open source," "That's not how ... the world works. If I was to release stuff, information that I'm not authorized to release, I'm breaking the law ... We're a nation of laws. We don't individually make our own decisions about how the laws operate ... He broke the law."

Manning transferred to an appropriate pre-trial confinement facility one month after Quantico arrests

After the publicity concerning Manning's treatment, the rally and the arrests, one month later on April 20, 2011, the Pentagon transferred him to a pre-trial confinement portion of a medium-security facility at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. At Fort Leavenworth, the prevention-of-injury order was lifted, Manning's clothes were not removed at night, and he has a cell with a large window with natural light and a normal mattress. He now can have contact with other pre-trial detainees, write whenever he wants, and keep personal objects, such as books and letters, in his cell.

Manning will turn 24 on December 17, 2011.

Following a rally across the road from the Marine Base, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg led a small group of veterans and military mother to the front gate of the base and four veterans and one military mom across the road to place flowers at the replica of the Iwo Jima memorial, located on public property to the side of the gate. Police had blocked off the memorial and forced the representatives to put flowers on the pavement, which the reps felt was an act of disrespect for veterans. When re-crossing the road, several of these reps sat down in the intersection. Traffic had already been blocked in both directions by the police.

The reps were quickly joined in the intersection by hundreds of citizens. After about 30 minutes, the police ordered everyone out of the intersection. 34 remained in the intersection and were arrested in a unique snatch and grab ninja turtle line of Virginia State troopers. Several persons, including myself, were knocked down by the troopers after they stood up for their arrest.

The arresting officers were from both Prince William County and the Virginia State police resulting in a variety of charges and a variety of ways of resolving the arrests. Some were allowed to pay a fine and depart, while others were arraigned and ended up in several court sessions.

Trial for Arrests on November 7, 2011

Since the March 20, 2011 arrests, some defendants pled guilty and paid fines, one refused and spent a day in jail, and others had their charges dismissed. The dismissal of the charges came about in an agreement that the defendants would give up their rights to a jury trial, and four of them would go forward in a bench trial before Prince William County, Virginia Circuit Judge Mary Grace O'Brien.

Finally, on November 7, 2011, the four defendants were tried in Circuit Court in Manassas, Virginia. Virginia pro bono attorneys John Zwerling and Cary Citronberg represented Jean Athey and Colonel Ann Wright. Iraq War veteran Helen Gerhardt, from Pittsburgh, and Baltimore peace and justice activist Max Obuszewski represented themselves as pro se defendants. Three of the defendants were facing a charge of malicious obstruction of traffic, and I was charged with "unlawful assembly."

Charge of "remaining at place of riot or unlawful assembly after warning to disperse," dismissed

The charge of "remaining at place of riot or unlawful assembly after warning to disperse," against me was dismissed by Circuit Court Judge Mary Grace O'Brien who ruled that there was insufficient evidence that I had used "force or violence" in remaining at the site of the protest. Use of "Force or violence" used by a

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prosecution. Instead, the prosecutor had argued that the Virginia statue meant that if the police had had to use “force or violence” to remove me from the site of the arrest, the elements of the charge had been met. Our lawyers were successful in convincing the judge that the prosecutor had turned the law upside down and the judge dismissed the case against me.

3 out of 34 convicted of “malicious and careless” obstruction of traffic

After a spirited defense by the pro se defendants and our lawyers, Judge O’Brien declared that the 3 defendants were guilty of obstruction of traffic. However, in announcing her findings of guilt, O’Brien concurred that the case “does bring in larger questions” about the motivations of the demonstrators.

Although she agreed that these larger issues were relevant, she felt that the issues in appropriate treatment of Bradley Manning in pre-trial confinement “would not be appropriate for me to consider.”

She disregarded the fact there was no evidence confirming the guilt of Athey, that Gerhardt had no intent to maliciously obstruct, that citizens had a Nuremberg Obligation to challenge government abuse or as Obuszewski observed, “I could not obstruct traffic as the police closed the road.” The 3 defendants were charged \$15 each in fines and another \$177 each in court costs.

Trial gets publicity for Bradley Manning’s case

The actions of the 400 citizens in gathering at the gates of the Quantico Marine Base to protest the conditions in which Bradley Manning was placed for over a year in during pre-trial confinement gained international publicity for Manning. The trial renewed that publicity.

As Manning continues to wait for his Article 32 hearing and court-martial, citizen activists are watching the actions of the government and will continue to protest when necessary for the proper treatment of a soldier who has not been convicted of any crime.

Julian Assange to be extradited to Sweden

On November 1, 2011, a British court ruled that Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder, can be extradited to Sweden for questioning over allegations of sexual abuse made against him by two women there last year. Citing comments by conservative politicians, including the former governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, who said Assange should be hunted down as “an anti-American operative,” Assange’s lawyers argued that if he were extradited from Sweden to the United States, he could face the death penalty over the leaking of classified American documents. In addition, Mr. Assange has indicated that he believes “world powers might be behind the sexual abuse charges,

seeing them as a way of silencing him and halting embarrassing leaks.”

US Court says Twitter must release data on Icelandic member of Parliament who is a Wikileaks supporter

Additionally, on November 10, 2011, a US judge ruled Twitter must release the details of the account of Icelandic MP and former WikiLeaks volunteer Birgitta Jonsdottir and those of two other Twitter users linked to WikiLeaks, Seattle-based WikiLeaks volunteer Jacob Appelbaum and Dutch hacker Rop Gonggrijp. Jonsdottir learned in January that her Twitter account was under scrutiny from the Justice Department because of her involvement last year with WikiLeaks’ release of a video now called “Collateral Murder” that shows a US military helicopter shooting two Reuters reporters in Iraq. Jonsdottir believes the US authorities want to use her information to try and build a case against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

In October, 2011, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which represents Members of Parliament from 157 countries, unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the U.S. Justice Department’s subpoena for their Twitter accounts. The IPU said the move threatened free speech and suggested it could violate Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which upholds the right of everyone to freedom of opinion and expression.

Army finally talking about an Article 32 Pre-Trial Hearing

On November 10, 2011, the Army revealed that it is finally preparing to hold an Article 32 pre-trial hearing that for the first time will disclose the government’s case in detail against Manning.

A spokeswoman for the Military District of Washington at Fort McNair, which has jurisdiction over the proceedings, said the investigative hearing will be held “in the Washington area.” She said the hearing will be open to the media, but asked that names of military officials involved not be disclosed.

The spokeswoman said that Manning’s defense teams’ request for information “was taking awhile because parts and pieces of the information belong to a lot of different agencies. So I know there was a lot intense coordination amongst everyone with all the different agencies.”

No date has been set for the Article 32 hearing and the sudden media announcement may be another stalling tactic.

Independent UN expert on torture calls for unrestricted access to Manning and other US detainees

On July 12, 2011, Juan Mendez, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, stated that it was “vital for him to have

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unmonitored access to Bradley Manning.”

“I am assured by the US Government that Mr. Manning’s prison regime and confinement is markedly better than it was when he was in Quantico, however, in addition to obtaining first hand information on my own about his new conditions of confinement, I need to ascertain whether the conditions he was subjected to for several months in Quantico amounted to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. For that, it is imperative that I talk to Mr. Manning under conditions where I can be assured that he is being absolutely candid.”

At the request of Mr. Méndez and after several meetings, the US Department of Defense said it would allow him to visit Mr. Manning, but warned that the conversation would be monitored.

Mendez said such a condition violated long-standing rules that the UN applies for prison visits and for interviews with inmates everywhere in the world. On humanitarian grounds and under protest, Mr. Méndez, through Mr. Manning’s counsel, offered to visit him under these restrictive conditions, an offer Manning declined.

“The question of my unfettered access to a detainee goes beyond my request to meet with Mr. Manning – it touches on whether I will be able to conduct private and unmonitored interviews with detainees if I were to conduct a country visit to the United States,” said Mr. Méndez.

Additionally, Mr. Méndez has requested several times since his appointment in November, 2010, that the US Government allow him to visit the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. However, the US government has not responded to his requests.

Call Army and demand unmonitored access to Bradley Manning for Juan Mendez, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture.

“Here Comes Trouble” Made me Recognize Myself

By Mashaw McGunnis

Well he’s done it again. Even though I have all of his books, and seen all of his documentaries, Michael Moore has still managed to surprise me. I wasn’t surprised that I laughed out loud, I expect that from him. In fact I would feel cheated if I paid \$25 something he wrote and I didn’t laugh. But some of the amazing things he did before he even got out of school! When most of us were worrying about who we would go to the prom with, he was already shaking things up on a national level!

I don’t want to give away any juicy tidbits here, but his collection of personal stories, which span his boyhood until the release of his first film “Roger and Me”, are overflowing with memories of early political activism. There are more than a few hints of the satirical-political powerhouse he was to become and the stories are just slathered with biting sarcasm!

His hilarious memoir made me think back to my own youth, and made me realize that I wasn’t just one of those “keep your head down” kids like I thought I was. I too, showed hints of activism even at the tender age of twelve.

In 1975 I was in seventh grade and we were not allowed to bring transistor radios to school. We considered ourselves lucky because we could tape “risqué” pictures from 16 Magazine inside of our lockers. For boys this meant Farrah Fawcett, for girls, Shawn Cassidy. But I loved rock and roll music passionately, and insisted that listening to it helped me “escape” and get my schoolwork done. So I defied the law of the school and snuck in a radio, hiding the earpiece in my hair. I got caught of course, and it was taken away and locked in the principal’s office. But I felt strongly that the action was unfair. After all, I rationalized; my grades were not suffering because of rock music. They were suffering because of my obsession over the opposite sex. And they weren’t banning boys, so I decided to petition the principal.

I wrote up a petition trying to use snooty, grown-up language like “We the undersigned...” and “consequently, the student body hereby proposes...” and started taking around to my friends, hoping I would get about 30 signatures. I wasn’t even sure if I had the courage to give it to the principal, but it made me feel important. Word spread around the campus like wildfire and soon kids I didn’t even know were coming up to me whispering “I heard about your petition, can I sign it?” Even better, was that the “cool” kids were approaching me, wanting to sign. I didn’t think they knew who I was! Before I knew it I was a campus celebrity and I had over 200 signatures. Then I had to go through with it, because more than half the school had something at stake.

I’m not sure if my actions were fueled by the taste of my newly found fame or if I just felt like we were being screwed and someone had to speak up. Maybe it was a little of both, after all I was only twelve. When I turned it in at the front office, the secretary glanced at it, and then gave me the evil eye. That’s when someone over 40 looks over their reading glasses and stares directly at you without blinking or smiling. I tried to act nonchalant by raising my eyebrows and turning up one corner of my mouth slightly, like I had nothing to hide. But inside I was shaking in my Earth shoes.

The next day in Mrs. French’s 5th period class, the secretary’s voice crackled over the intercom. My name was called and I was requested in the principal’s office. The room went silent so fast that you would’ve thought someone had just announced Casey Kasem had died and there would be no more “American top 40”. 25 sets of eyes were on me when I stood up. As I made my way down the aisle there were whispers “good luck” and “give ‘em hell” and at least one “you are in big trouble now!”

Inside the principal’s office I only received a mild lecture, with

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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

some B.S. about how I showed promise as a future leader. "It's nice to see a student using the democratic method to reach for their goals" and so on. What a crock! There was no way in hell they were going to allow junior high school kids to bring their own transistor radios to school. I was young, but I was smart enough to know I was getting lip service. I was also not given my radio back, but told I could collect it at the end of the year. I went back to class and back to my life without a transistor radio during school days.

But instead of feeling defeated that day, I felt somehow empowered. During that same year I convinced the powers that be to let me paint a mural on the handball court with names and logos of popular rock and roll groups of the time. I took a poll of the student body, to see which groups were the favorites, so it would be a representation of the majority. I started paying attention to things the student council did, and began talking to classmates about things that were happening at the time, like our country pulling finally pulling out of the Viet Nam war. I didn't completely understand it, but I knew it was important.

I suspect there are many of us in our membership who have experienced things like this when we were young. Pivotal points when we stepped out of our safety zone and took a risk when we thought something just wasn't right. Michael Moore's new book "Here Comes Trouble" is full of these kinds of tales (only much, much funnier)!

I encourage all of you to read it, and you might like I did, see yourself in some of his stories. And I challenge you to write down at least one story from your youth containing some foreshadowing of your future activism. Please share them in the next Foghorn!

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