

## Some Memories of Granny D

by Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, March 10, 2010

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000 – Sierra Club founder John Muir’s birthday, and one day before Earth Day – I joined Granny D and 30 others, representing numerous national environmental groups (Rainforest Action Network, Ozone Action, Public Citizen, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, and many others) for an act of civil disobedience at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. We were there to get the corrupting influence of toxic corporations’ campaign contributions and lobbying out of the making of environmental law. I was there specifically to protest the U.S. nuclear power industry’s attempt to ram the Yucca Mountain high-level radioactive waste dump through Congress and into law, despite scientific soundness and Western Shoshone Indian treaty rights to the contrary.

Granny D had never even gotten a speeding or parking ticket before. This was her first arrest in her 90 year long life. She spent the hour waiting in the long line of tourists leading into the Capitol Rotunda explaining to a large group of elementary school students what she was about to do and why. She was arrested in the ornate Rotunda, standing in front of a statue honoring the leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, while reading the Declaration of Independence, for “behavior unlike a tourist” (yes, that is an actual DC ordinance!).

The Capitol Police held us for many long hours all together in a big room. We made the most of it. We arranged the folding chairs in a big circle, and all 32 of us shared stories of why we were there that day, why we had risked arrest, and “peace stories” from past actions. It was a very moving experience to be in the company of such moral giants as Granny D. After all, she had just walked 3,200 miles from Pasadena, CA to Washington, DC – 10 miles per day, for 14 months, a spiritual and political pilgrimage for campaign finance reform. (U.S. Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold would later honor Granny D for her help in the passage of their historic Campaign Finance Reform Act, which became law in 2002.)

At trial later that spring, the Chief Judge of the DC Courts, a grandfatherly African American gentleman, allowed each of the 32 of us to explain our reasons why we had committed non-violent civil disobedience. The testimonies were very moving -- and sometimes very lengthy! After hours of such testimonials, our pro bono lawyer, Mark Goldstone of Washington DC, warned us that we might be angering the judge by taking up so much of his time, and we still faced his ruling on our sentencing (we had already pleaded guilty to behaving unlike tourists!).

But the most moving words of all came from the judge himself, who at the end of the proceeding praised us for being at the vanguard of our democracy, trying to protect it from the corrupting influence of corporate cash on our political system. He was going to waive any punishment upon us at all, but the prosecuting attorney protested, so he charged us each a mere \$10, which went to the DC Victims of Crime Fund. The judge then invited Granny D into his chambers, in order to speak with her personally at length, and to take a photograph together with her.

After that experience, over the next months and years, it was wonderful to bump into Granny D in the “halls of power,” where she was battling for campaign finance reform – sometimes walking laps around the Capitol Building as a political vigil -- and I was battling against the Yucca Mountain dump. She was always so enthusiastic to be fighting in defense of justice, democracy and the environment, and happy to recall our civil disobedience action together at the Rotunda, every time I saw her.

It is a fitting tribute that Granny D is featured in an HBO documentary entitled “Run Granny Run” (see <http://www.grannyd.com/>). The title of her memoir, *Granny D: You’re Never Too Old to Raise a Little Hell*, is also most appropriate (see <http://www.grannyd.com/book.html>). May her example inspire us all.