

Maisie Shiell, vociferous uranium mining opponent, dies 21 May 2008

The legendary watchdog activism of Saskatchewan's Maisie Shiell has earned her respect from both sides of the uranium mining debate. She has been a tough-minded, tireless crusader for nuclear responsibility for three decades.

In 2002, Shiell received the *Saskatchewan Eco-Network* award for individual *Environmentalist of the Year* and also shared the *Lifetime Achievement Award* given by the *Canadian Environmental Network*. In 2004, the Canadian Environment Awards sponsored by Canadian Geographic and Shell Canada honored her with a silver award in the environmental health category. She was internationally recognized in 1998 when she received the very first *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the Munich-based Nuclear Free Future.

Beneath her benevolent exterior, this 91 year-old Saskatoon grandmother has been described as the most informed private citizen in Canada on the subject of uranium extraction. Shiell has spent 30 years achieving her daunting level of expertise and industry and government officials alike know one thing-her renown for asking tough questions and expecting answers. It has been said that she lived Saskatchewan's version of the Broadway musical tune, 'Nobody Likes to Mess with Maisie.'

Her primary concern has been alpha radiation released during the extraction and refining of the high-grade uranium unique to northern Saskatchewan. She believes its potential to cause cell mutation poses a hazard not only for the miners but for the environment, as millions of tons of highly radioactive tailings will remain exposed for time periods that dwarf the span of human history. She has also prepared technical briefs for the ICUCEC on issues such as the spill of over 100 million litres of water contaminated with radium-226 at the Cluff Lake mine site during 1997 and 1998.

Maisie Shiell came to her anti-nuclear calling in 1976 when public concern developed over the opening up of uranium mining in Saskatchewan. So, at sixty-one years of age, she began learning how to translate the highly technical issues about radioactivity into something she could understand and pass along to other

lay people. She took a university course in chemistry, read everything she could get her hands on, corresponded with experts, and began showing up at public debates to challenge uranium mining officials on their own terrain. From 1976 on, Shiell attended every nuclear hearing held in Saskatchewan. She has also frequented press conferences, public hearings and stockholder meetings across Canada, any gathering that has to do with uranium and nuclear issues.

Maisie's kittenish, bespectacled smile belies her intense dedication to making the world a safer place for her children, grandchildren, and the coming generations. She says of herself, "My goal in life is to leave behind a safe and healthy world for our children. Before I leave this world, I want to be satisfied that at least I tried. I know I can make a difference, even if it might only be a small one."

Maisie grew up in England. In the aftermath of World War II, she went to Germany with the Red Cross to help ease the sufferings of the war's dispossessed. It was there that she met her future husband, Jim Shiell, a Canadian soldier. They married and settled on a farm outside of Govan. During the fifties and early sixties, Maisie was the local correspondent for the Regina Leader Post and also wrote articles for the Saskatoon StarPhoenix. When her husband died in 1965, she had to raise their four children alone. After completing a two-year teacher's course at Regina Teachers College, she taught school in rural Saskatchewan and at Montreal Lake Indian Reservation in northern Saskatchewan. Her interaction with First Nations peoples profoundly inspired her interest in nature and in environmental issues.

During her most active years she always strove to live sustainably using wood heat and traveling by public transportation. She also organized a Regina seniors group to carry out local and distance education around sustainable living. In 2005, on her 90th birthday, friends and associates gathered in Saskatoon to celebrate her spunk and her many contributions. She is still honored as the 'Mighty Maisie'.

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