

## **Nuclear Hotseat #781 - June 16, 2026 - 15th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL! Caldicott, Jaczko, Starr, Graff, Church Rock, Rainbow Warrior Sinking, More!**

**Libbe HaLevy:** [00:00:00] Nuclear Hotseat. That two-word title was launched into the world on June 14, 2011, only three months after the triple meltdown at Fukushima in Japan. It was the debut of something, I didn't know what, but thought that maybe it was a podcast. And for the first time, other people heard me say...

**Libbe HaLevy:** Since Fukushima on March 11th of this year, , I have been absorbed in what's going on, the information that's out there, the various ramifications it's having, the lack of information that is getting to most people, and what it is that we need to do in order to maintain our health, maintain our sanity, and do something to turn around the nuclear situation so that we're no longer being, um, subjected to the dangers of having a dirty bomb in our backyard.[00:01:00]

And from that has come everything else. Well, nobody could have predicted, least of all me, that 15 years later I'd be here working on episode number 781 with a weekly archive stretching back for a decade and a half, chronicling the good, the bad, and the you've-got-to-be-kidding about nuclear, that clearly spells out what we're facing, and what we're doing about it, to get rid of that awful, deadly, dangerous seat that we all share.

**Nuclear Hotseat Theme:** Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking? Nuclear Hotseat. What have those boys been drinking? Nuclear Hotseat. The corium is sinking. Our time to act is shrinking, but our activists are linking.

Nuclear Hotseat. [00:02:00] It's da bomb

**Libbe HaLevy:** Welcome to Nuclear Hotseat, the weekly international news magazine keeping you up to date on all things nuclear from a different perspective. We're a show for people who know nothing about nuclear who would like to know something, and people who already know something about nuclear who would like to know just a little bit more.

My name is Libbe HaLevy I'm the producer and host, as well as a survivor of the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island from just one mile away, so I know what can happen when those nuclear so-called experts get it wrong. This week, we mark the 15th anniversary of Nuclear Hotseat with a look back on how it all

got started, excerpts from some of our favorite and most impactful interviews, shine a spotlight on our featured commentators, [00:03:00] and much more.

If there's something you want to know about why we need to oppose nuclear in all its many forms, stick around for a whole bunch of easy-to-understand tidbits gleaned from the last 15 years. Today is Tuesday, June 16th, 2026, and here is this week's Nuclear Hotseat's 15th Anniversary Special, of course, from a different perspective.

First, my background. I was conscripted into the world of nuclear hyper-awareness by having been one mile from the nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on March 28, 1979. I was visiting a friend who had just moved to the area six months before. Talk about timing. We didn't evacuate until the third day, and the trauma of being next to a malfunctioning nuclear reactor that, as far as we knew at the time, was in danger of blowing up, [00:04:00] is something I wish on none of you.

In the wake of that experience, I tried to become an activist, but had too much post-traumatic stress to deal with it or deal with people who did not have a clue. The final straw on my early attempt was attending a rally concert marketplace put on by the LA-based Alliance for Survival, where someone was selling candles in the shape of Three Mile Island cooling towers so you could have your own personal meltdown.

I stepped away from any attempt at activism, down to ignoring Chernobyl when it happened. But by Fukushima, I could look on what was happening courtesy the internet, and became first obsessed with the information, and then with the need to do something with everything I was learning. The full story is in my book, *Yes, I Glow in the Dark*, but in brief, three months after Fukushima began, I posted a single [00:05:00] request on Facebook for people who might wanna join with me on a conference call/podcast, only it wasn't really a podcast at the time.

It would be to discuss the issues raised by this ongoing disaster, the tension we were all feeling, and what we might be able to do about it. Two people actually showed up, including one I had never met, and on June 14, 2011, it all started like this.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Okay, here we go, guys. Um- Okay. My name is Libbe HaLevy, and we are talking on Tuesday, June 14th, 2011, and, , the purpose of this call is to discuss the nuclear issues that are going on in the world.

Um, I have a particular interest in this because I, , was at Three Mile Island when it happened. I was one mile away. That was back in 1979, and ever since, I have been acutely aware of what's [00:06:00] going on with, with the nuclear industry. Maybe not completely conversant. There are times I avoided the information completely.

But certainly since Fukushima on March 11th of this year, , I have been absorbed in what's going on, the information that's out there, the various ramifications it's having, the lack of information that is getting to most people, and what it is that we need to do in order to maintain our health, maintain our sanity, and do something to turn around the nuclear situation so that we're no longer being, um, subjected to the dangers of having a dirty bomb in our backyard.

Um- There are a lot of directions I could go with this, but I think where I would like to focus is to let you know that this is about sparking an activist response. Um, a lot of times online we get all excited, and we sign petitions, and we forward [00:07:00] videos, and we say, "Ooh, look at this. Oh, isn't this, isn't this upsetting?"

Oh, isn't this terrible?" And then it all dies down and goes away, and nothing has translated into action in the analog world, in the physical world. It's just been a bro aha online. So what I would like to do is address this from a perspective of what can we do to take action, small steps leading to larger steps that can put an activist response into the world so we can start turning this thing around?

**Libbe HaLevy:** And with that pledge, little did I know what I was getting myself into. The exciting part was getting to contact people who had been part of the movement against nuclear for decades, and been present or direct participants in some of our most momentous historic moments. By allowing them to tell their stories, I became educated, and I got to share this information with [00:08:00] all of you One of the most remarkable interviews I conducted was with Dr.

Helen Caldicott. She is an Australian physician, author, and prominent anti-nuclear activist who has dedicated her medical and public life to campaigning against nuclear weapons, nuclear power, and environmental hazards. I like to think of her as the mother of us all. She notably founded Physicians for Social Responsibility in the US, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, and remains a leading voice in the international peace movement.

Here, Dr. Caldicott tells the story of how she almost convinced US President Ronald Reagan to get rid of nukes.

**Dr. Helen Caldicott:** At one of the symposia I spoke, and a woman came up to me afterwards, and she said, "I'm an agent for Hollywood film stars. I'd like to work with you." I said, "I can't afford you." She said, "I'll do it for free."

Sally Field, Lily [00:09:00] Tomlin, Tom Cruise, all of these people were her clients. So no one wants a boring, old medical doctor talking about nuclear war on television, but if they've got Sally Field along with me or whoever, then that's great. And so she put me on with the film stars on television and radio, in Vogue, in Life, in women's magazines all over the country.

And so as I was on television, I was speaking to Mr. And Mrs. Joe Sixpack sitting with their kids watching television. So through that mechanism, over 80% of Americans started to understand what nuclear war means. And then a film was made called The Day After, which it was a bomb dropping on Midwestern town.

Everyone watched it. People had psychologists ready to counsel children because it was so scary. It was a film that helped turn Ronald Reagan around. I was asked to speak in the Playboy [00:10:00] Mansion before it... all the film stars in Hollywood. Paul Newman was there to speak with me. I'd never met him. I walked into the Playboy Mansion, and he kissed my hand, and I nearly collapsed to this feet.

He was so beautiful. Anyway, my agent said, "Look, these are film stars. You can be emotional tonight Normally when I gave a speech to 1- like 2,000 people, I'd have to be extremely scientific and establish my credentials, and only at the end could I go for their emotions and talk about how much do they love their children and smell a rose and the like.

But this time I was quite emotional and I said at the end, "Go out and look up at the stars tonight and realize that we're probably the only life in the universe." Well, apparently Kris Kristofferson had collapsed in my arms weeping at the end of my talk. I can't remember that. But also this tall, skinny girl came up to me and said, "I'm Patti [00:11:00] Davis.

I think you're the only person on Earth who can convince my father about nuclear weapons." And she was Reagan's daughter. "Will you see him?" I did a quick double-take and I said, "I'll see him, but alone, without Meese, Baker, or

Deaver." And so she rang me the next day and said, "We've got an hour at the when, end of his working day."

And I said, "What time is that?" She said, "4:00," which alarmed me a little. We had lunch, swept into the southern portico, went into the Lancer Library in which there was no, were no books. He came in all dithery. He didn't know where to sit. I sh- shook his hand and said, "How do you do, Mr. Pres-..." So I ch- showed him where to sit, and we talked for an hour and a quarter.

Patty sat there, but I was alone with him. I had longer time with him alone than any other person during his presidency. He started off by, oh, I said, "I suppose, , you don't know who I am." And he said, "Yes, you're an Australian. You ran on the [00:12:00] beach and you're scared of nuclear war." And I said, "Yes." And he said, "I too am scared of nuclear war, but a ways to prevent it is to build more nuclear weapons."

So we were off to a flying start. I'd just written my book, *Missile Envy*, and I had figures and facts just pouring out of me. And so he'd get quite uptight when he'd make a, a remark and I would correct him. So I ended up holding his hand, developing a doctor-patient relationship with him for about half the time, just reassuring him, teaching him.

At the end I thought, "Well, I, you know, I haven't had any influence at all." But after that, he started saying nuclear war must never be fought and can never be won. I think it was partly the result of the film *The Day After*, partly the result of me. He mentioned me as his, in his autobiography, and Nancy Reagan was onto it too.

And in the end, he and Gorbachev met in Reykjavik for, in, in [00:13:00] Iceland, and over a weekend two mere mortals almost agreed to abolish nuclear weapons. But they got stuck up on Star Wars, and Gorbachev should have said to Reagan, you know, "Yeah, have Star Wars," 'cause he knew it wouldn't work. But they got stuck on Star Wars, and the whole thing fell apart.

I remember Secretary of Defense Schultz came out from the meeting and he said, "We did this and we achieved that and we achieved this." And then his face fell and then he said, "It didn't work." I later went to Reykjavik, and the people took me to that little house, and it was a little house, and they'd cleared the area for about a mile around, and there were men standing with guns all around to protect it.

Reagan and Gorbachev met in one room, Shultz and Shevardnadze in the other room. Upstairs was Richard Perle, the Prince of Darkness who worked [00:14:00] in the Pentagon. And so Reagan would run into Shultz and give him, talk about what had been proposed. Shultz would run up to Richard Perle in the bathroom, who's writing numbers on lavatory paper, 'cause he didn't have any paper.

And then they'd come down, and downstairs were the KGB, and I don't know, I suppose they were drinking vodka, and someone threw a lighted match into the rubbish tin, and it caught fire, and they nearly burnt the whole place down. I, I've got that story straight from the horse's mouth. Amazing, eh? Amazing.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Dr.

Helen Caldicott. Our interview was so long and intricate that I ran it in two parts for Nuclear Hotseat number 568, May 11, 2022, and 569, May 18, 2022. Those who support the ongoing building and stockpiling of nuclear [00:15:00] weapons claim that those weapons are necessary because they protect us by providing deterrence, meaning by having them, we will guarantee that they will not be used.

This nuclear double-speak hogwash was more diplomatically but firmly expressed by Melissa Parke, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, or ICAN. She traveled to Japan for the 80th anniversary commemoration of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We caught up with her while she was in Nagasaki the day after the Hiroshima anniversary ceremony.

We discussed both ceremonies, the dilemma of the Korean Hibakusha, and then got into the key discussion of why the concept of deterrence is a false hope that leaves the door open for disaster, and why the only way to end the nuclear threat is to abolish nuclear weapons entirely. [00:16:00] We spoke for Nuclear Hotseat number 737 on August 13, 2025.

For those listening who might not be familiar with the alternative take on deterrence, it's touted as being the only way that we can protect ourselves, yada, yada. When you say deterrence, explain what it is that you mean.

**Melissa Parke:** Well, nuclear deterrence, simply put, means the willingness and readiness of nuclear armed states to inflict indiscriminate catastrophic harm on millions of innocent people and the environment as a way of deterring attacks.

The very possession of nuclear weapons poses a constant and unacceptable threat to humanity. There was a Australian former foreign minister, Gareth Evans, who co-chaired the International [00:17:00] Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, along with the former Japanese foreign minister Yoriko Kawaguchi.

Gareth said, "Keeping stockpiles of nuclear weapons is not a risk-free enterprise, even if you only intend to use them by way of retaliation. The deterrent utility of nuclear weapons is illusory, and the risk of retaining nuclear weapons far outweighs any benefit from having them." So he said that. The quote that I love the most, because I think it sums it all up, is the one from Joseph Rotblat, who was one of the early nuclear scientists on the Manhattan Project, and the only one to leave it for moral reasons, who went on to campaign for nuclear disarmament and won the Nobel Peace Prize.

He said [00:18:00] about nuclear deterrence that it is the ultimate form of terrorism, and it is. That's exactly what it is. It's holding the world to ransom, and the thing is, as Gareth said, I mean, even if you don't ever intend to use them except by way of retaliation, and even that would be contrary to international law and morality because you're inflicting, you know, one atrocity does not excuse another.

But even if that's ... You know, things happen. Accidents happen. You know, we've had ... There are more than 50 nuclear weapons sitting at the bottom of the ocean that have fallen out of planes, rolled off of ships, sunk with nuclear submarines. We've had incidents where the moonlight, flying swans, reflections off of clouds have been mistaken in radar detection equipment, and they've been mistaken for incoming missiles, [00:19:00] and training exercises have been mistaken as the real thing.

And so these sorts of things have happened in the past. And could have ended in disaster, and it's only been really luck or having a person who was prepared, as Stanislav Petrov was, prepared to go against his own country's protocols and not elevate the issue to, to see that there was a counterattack from Russia.

And, you know, he was hailed at the UN as the man who saved the earth, but he was not treated well in Russia because he hadn't followed the protocol- Yeah ... even though it would have meant, you know, the end of the world. So, so

the fact is that deterrence is a very, ... it's a psychological concept relying upon 100% rationality and predictability of all actors, including one's enemies, 100% of the time, [00:20:00] relying upon full knowledge of the enemy's intentions.

You know, we know that human beings frequently don't act rationally, and machines can make mistakes as humans can.

You know, you can't deter mistakes and miscalculations. You can't deter unhinged leaders and cyberattacks. You know, there are so many things that cannot be deterred. And so naturally, even if deterrence might work sometimes, it manifestly won't work all the time, and that means that when you've got weapons that can destroy humanity, that risk is not acceptable.

These weapons have to be eliminated. That's the only way to eliminate the existential threat they pose.

**Libbe HaLevy:** All it takes is one mistake, and deterrence means absolutely nothing except disaster.

**Melissa Parke:** Yep.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Melissa Parke, [00:21:00] Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Nuclear weapons dangers are not only created by explosions here on Earth.

There's been a growing amount of talk about placing nukes in space, even though the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 explicitly forbids weapons of mass destruction from being deployed in the space environment. What could be the impact on life on Earth from a single nuclear bomb explosion in space? That's what I discussed in my interview with Professor Steven Starr.

He directed the Clinical Laboratory Science program at the University of Missouri in Columbia for 11 years until his retirement in 2021. He continues as an associate of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, and has been a board member and senior scientist with Physicians for Social Responsibility. Here, he brings up another crucial point [00:22:00] about EMPs, electromagnetic pulse.

I spoke with Professor Steven Starr for Nuclear Hotseat number 626 on June 21st, 2023. What is a high altitude electromagnetic pulse?

**Prof. Steven Starr:** It's created by a high altitude detonation of a nuclear weapon, beginning at about 19 miles up above the Earth and up to hundreds of miles above that. There's no blast or thermal fire effects that are produced, but it creates a gigantic electromagnetic field or a pulse that will cover the entire continental of the United States, and this would bring down most or all of the

US national electric grid, and that would go for any national electric grid that hasn't been shielded from electromagnetic pulse.

**Libbe HaLevy:** With this high level electromagnetic pulse, which is sometimes referred to as a HEMP or an EMP, E-M-P, how long would it take [00:23:00] for it to have an effect on the grid, and how high would the pulse itself actually be compared to normal usage or normal load on the electrical systems?

**Prof. Steven Starr:** Well, it happens at the speed of light.

And so in a few billionths of a second, these giant electromagnetic fields will strike the Earth, and they will induce these massive voltages and currents into any electrically conductive material. In particular, the power lines and telecom lines can have up to two million volts for a medium distribution power line, which will create, , 5 to 10,000 amps in that line.

And so anything that's plugged into the grid at that point is gonna get this massive surge of electricity, and most modern electronic devices only operate at a few volts if they're solid state electronics. So it's, if they're not shielded from this, they're gonna get cooked.

**Libbe HaLevy:** What would the impact be in terms of the way we are used to [00:24:00] conducting life right now in this portion of the 21st century?

**Prof. Steven Starr:** Well, everything depends on electricity in modern society. So if the grid is knocked out, and, see, the grid will remain out for months or longer because of some of the components that are gonna be destroyed in it, but I can explain that a little later. In the areas that are within, say, 70 to 100,000 square miles beneath the detonation, all the solid state electronics would be fried, and our critical national infrastructure relies on modern electronic devices to operate.

So all the critical infrastructure in this affected area would cease to function, and that would include ground, sea, rail, and air transportation systems, fuel and food distribution systems, water and sanitation systems, telecommunication systems, financial systems, emergency services. About anything you can think of would just be knocked out almost instantly.

**Libbe HaLevy:** So we would [00:25:00] basically be stuck in place with no services coming to us and our resources being depleted, which sounds to me like the total breakdown of Western civilization, or what passes for it.

**Prof. Steven Starr:** Well, if this happened, suddenly you would have no running water. You would have no heating or cooling. You would n- not be able to get gas for your car because you wouldn't be able to deliver fuel.

All the transportation systems would be knocked out. It would be like suddenly being transported back into the 18th century, only we really don't know how to survive in that environment. All the, the food in the grocery stores relies, anything that's refrigerated would be ruined in a couple of days, and it, the stores usually only have three days worth of food in them, so in that period, after that, there wouldn't be any food to get.

I mean, it, it would be an, a utter nightmare. It'd be a catastrophic event.

**Libbe HaLevy:** I hate it when the preppers are proved right.

**Prof. Steven Starr:** Yeah. [00:26:00]

**Libbe HaLevy:** Professor Steven Starr. If you'd like to learn more, his book has been published since our interview. It's entitled Nuclear High-Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse: A Mortal Threat to the US Power Grid and US Nuclear Power Plants So what do you do if a nuke is launched at you?

For most of us, the answer is a variant on kiss your posterior goodbye. But for top-level government officials in Washington, D.C., they have an option not open to the rest of us. Isn't that special? Garrett Graff spilled the beans in his book Raven Rock: The Story of the U.S. Government's Secret Plan to Save Itself While the Rest of Us Die.

It explains how your tax dollars are at work, but not for you, because they are protecting the politicians and policy wonks. [00:27:00] I interviewed Garrett Graff for Nuclear Hotseat number 319 on August 1st, 2017.

**Garrett Graff:** It's almost mind-boggling in scale. I mean, so the three major bunkers that were built during the Cold War were Raven Rock in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, Mount Weather in Berryville, Virginia, and then Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

And these facilities are truly hollowed-out mountains that have been filled with small cities made up of freestanding buildings. They contain everything that you would expect in a small city. I mean, they've got their own fire departments, their own police departments, their own medical facilities, cafeterias, everything

that you would need to support life underground for weeks or even a month or two at a time.

And even whereas many of these facilities nationwide have been [00:28:00] shut down in the, you know, 25 years since the end of the Cold War, the three biggest, Mount Weather, Raven Rock, and NORAD in Colorado Springs, they still operate. , they're still being updated. They're still running 24 hours a day, still staffed 24 hours a day.

Cheyenne Mountain actually has a Subway fast food franchise inside today that helps feed its workforce. So you can still get your \$5 footlongs even after nuclear Armageddon.

**Libbe HaLevy:** What a thing to be able to have after the apocalypse.

**Garrett Graff:** Yes.

**Libbe HaLevy:** It struck me as naive that the plan seemed to call for supplies that would last two weeks, three weeks, maybe four weeks, at most a few months.

Do you actually think that they believe that that will be enough to weather the worst of the apocalypse before coming back up again?

**Garrett Graff:** So the goal was effectively to protect against the [00:29:00] initial blasts- And then the peak of the fallout that was expected and calculated to last about two to three weeks, and that the hope and the expectation was that after two to three weeks, you know, the world wouldn't be normal on the outside by any stretch of the imagination, but that you would be able to at least venture outside and forage for food supplies and reactivate the gas stations and oil tankers and those types of things.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Again, the word that comes to mind is naive because for this- ... for this show, we cover the effects of nuclear radiation, and even so-called low level radiation over the long run can be more devastating than that which comes from fallout from an initial nuclear blast. Absolutely, yeah. So there seems to be a hole in their thinking, if not many more than one, but we can get to some more of those.

All of this is to guarantee what [00:30:00] is called continuity of government, that our government officials survive and can reestablish the United States.

Explain to us a bit about what continuity of government is supposed to look like and how it's supposed to function.

**Garrett Graff:** Continuity of government was the umbrella term used to describe a whole series of different plans through the Cold War and even to the present day.

You can break them down into a couple of broad categories. The first are, who would actually be in charge of the nuclear weapons and the nuclear arsenal as an attack unfolded minute by minute, hour by hour? And so that's a whole series of plans to protect the president, to protect top advisors, to ensure communications systems operate through an enemy attack, and that was, you know, an incredibly elaborate system at its peak during the [00:31:00] Cold War.

You had special designated floating White Houses, special Navy ships at sea that could have served as an emergency command post for the president. You had these massive bunkers, , at Raven Rock, at Mount Weather, where the president and his cabinet could be evacuated. You had doomsday airplane, the airborne command post 747s that were known as the Nightwatch planes, the presidential doomsday planes that were kept on constant alert in and around Washington through the Cold War.

Those planes, by the way, still exist today, still sitting alert. Um, you know, as we are talking here, one of those presidential doomsday planes is on alert at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska. It is fully staffed, its engines are turning, and it is ready to launch in just 15 minutes. Then you have a second sort of broad sweep of [00:32:00] plans that deal with how the government would rebuild in the days, weeks, and months after an attack, and this is where I, I found some of the strangest information of my research, which was the way that the government reimagined the post-apocalyptic analog of its peacetime government.

And so the post office was the agency that was in charge of registering the dead and figuring out who was still left alive. The National Park Service was the agency that would have actually run the refugee camps because the expectation was the refugee camps could be largely set up on national park land, which wouldn't be targeted by a nuclear attack.

The Department of Agriculture was in charge of feeding Americans and devoted an incredible amount of energy to manufacturing millions [00:33:00] upon millions of survival crackers, these little graham cracker-like wafers made by

Nabisco and Kroger and other companies and stockpiled in fallout shelters around the country, , in the event of nuclear war.

And then, you know, these plans evolved and changed over the course of the Cold War. Dwight Eisenhower had this extensive plan to bring in private sector leaders who would be deputized by Eisenhower in advance to come in and nationalize entire industries. You know, you'd have one person in charge of manufacturing, one person in charge of housing, one person in charge of all wages and prices in the United States, one person in charge of all transportation in the United States.

And that these figures, you know, walked around through the Eisenhower presidency with these doomsday emergency letters of authorization. No one knew who they were. No one knew [00:34:00] that they had this special set of emergency powers in the event of an attack, and they would have just emerged and announced that they were in charge of the country afterwards.

And even while we don't necessarily know that that plan has any modern analogs, many of these plans actually do. The updated sets of these plans today call for the post office to be the agency in charge of distributing medical countermeasures in the event of a public health pandemic or biological or chemical attack on the United States.

And that they have a whole plan at the post office where your friendly neighborhood postman or postwoman would be the person knocking on your door to give you the anthrax antidote or the Ebola vaccine.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Author Garrett Graff. I invite you to check out our full interview on Nuclear Hotseat number three-nineteen from August first, [00:35:00] twenty seventeen.

We'll continue with this week's special 15th anniversary show in just a moment. But first, have you started to get an idea of the breadth and width of what Nuclear Hotseat covers? Every week for one hour, we not only go into the nuclear issue in all of its hydra-headed horrors, but we feature activists and actions that give us hope for the future, as well as health and lifestyle changes that you can use to help protect you from nuclear radiation.

There are news segments, numb nuts of the week for outstanding nuclear boneheadedness, excerpts from films and music when we get permission from copyright holders, editorials, and almost anything that deals with nuclear issues

from that all-important different perspective. What you're hearing today merely scratches the surface of what we make available.

I call the show a magazine format because if you don't like a particular feature or story, [00:36:00] wait a moment and another will come up. Information is scaled for the non-techies among us. I'm not one, so I figure if I can wrap my head around an issue, I'll be able to explain it to you in a way that you'll be able to understand.

I've been doing this for 15 years, and at this point, I'll keep doing it for as long as I can. So in honor of our 15th anniversary, I invite you to make a donation to help us keep going. \$15 would be a nice acknowledgment, or multiples of \$15 if you can, or whatever you can afford. No amount is too great or too small. We are a 501 non-profit organization, which means that your donations are tax-deductible.

Just go to [nuclearhotseat.com](http://nuclearhotseat.com) and click on the red donate button. If you have Zelle, you can send money directly to [info@nuclearhotseat.com](mailto:info@nuclearhotseat.com). Don't [00:37:00] wait. Please donate now by going to [nuclearhotseat.com](http://nuclearhotseat.com), and know that whatever you can do to help, it's necessary. I'm deeply grateful that you're listening and that you care.

One of the pleasures of doing this show is to be able to allow other activists to have time and space to share their perspective. To that end, a select number have come on board for monthly or more frequent features where they have three to five minutes to talk about whatever they find most important.

Content is entirely up to them. I give input only on mic quality, volume, and length. Among our regulars past and present, Alistair Burnett, media director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons with the monthly ICAN report, where he lets us know the latest on the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Alistair is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and provides stories and interviews from an [00:38:00] international perspective on efforts to ban nuclear weapons entirely. Jack Cohen-Joppa of the Nuclear Resister with monthly Tales of the Nuke Resister, stories from our shared history of nonviolent direct action for a nuclear-free future and to help inspire our activism today.

Jack is such a good storyteller, and the stories are so compelling that I like to think of this as our milk and cookies feature because his voice is so soothing

and his stories so hopeful. John LaForge with the Nuke Watch Report, an in-depth feature about the actions of frontline activists around the world.

It got derailed from regular production when John was arrested in Germany. That was for an action protesting US nuclear weapons stockpiled at Germany's Büchel Air Force Base, and John served jail time. Talk about walking your talk. While he's no longer a regular on the [00:39:00] show, we try to get John on whenever we can.

And then of course, there's Linda Pentz Gunter with the Nuclear Hotseat Hot Story. She is founder of Beyond Nuclear, and prior to her work in anti-nuclear advocacy, she was a journalist for 20 years in print and broadcast, working for USA Network, Reuters, The Times UK, and other US and international outlets.

Now she brings her journalistic excellence, wit, sarcasm, and British accent to Nuclear Hotseat on an almost weekly basis. Here's her feature, The Nuclear Hotseat Hot Story, recorded specially for this week's anniversary program.

**Linda Pentz Gunter:** When you try to remember what you were doing 15 years ago, it can be a bit of a blur, at least if, like me, you are many decades into your life already.

But for those of us in the anti-nuclear movement, 15 years ago is a sort of John F. [00:40:00] Kennedy moment. 15 years ago, on March the 11th, 2011, many of us woke up to the chilling news that something was going very wrong at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant site in coastal Japan, and it only got worse from there.

We were glued to NHK TV for their 24-hour news cycle covering the unfolding drama at the plant. We remember the explosions. We witnessed from afar the triple horrors the Japanese people were experiencing as first a powerful earthquake toppled buildings, and then a deadly tsunami swept them and countless people away.

And then came the explosions and the triple nuclear meltdowns, and the almost impossible decisions that had to be made in a desperate effort to control an uncontrollable situation. For some of us, we were suddenly on television as well. After years trying to coach reluctant reporters to, at the very least, listen to us, even if they rarely have ever [00:41:00] quoted us, suddenly we were royalty.

Limos appeared at our house with Ferrero Rocher chocolates and the New York Times in the backseat, arriving at unearthly hours to whisk us to remote television studios for crack of dawn or late-night interviews. For a couple of weeks, we were no longer Cassandras warning of what could be. Suddenly we were believed, and then it all went away, replaced by a massive campaign still ongoing today to downplay, diminish, and dismiss the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its consequences.

The sensible inquiring discussions we had had with hosts frequently, if rather surprisingly, on Fox, which seemed then to be the most on top of the story, were replaced with the "no one died" narrative, which of course we have heard before. First, after the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979, and then after the Chernobyl reactor exploded in 1986, when the narrative got tweaked slightly [00:42:00] from "no one died" to "almost no one died".

Luckily, as the media frenzy faded, not everyone went back to business as usual. Most notably the host of this podcast, Lebbly HaLevy, whose reawakening to the very real threat the nuclear power industry represents occurred in the wake of the Fukushima disaster. HaLevy is of course the author of her memoir, *Yes, I Glow in the Dark*, based in part on her experience of being a stone's throw away from the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant when it partially melted down in March 1979.

Shortly after the Fukushima disaster began to unfold, HaLevy launched *Nuclear Hotseat*, and here we still are. *Bravissima*. HaLevy was not alone in her epiphany. For the past 15 years, I've continued to meet people who remember exactly where they were on March 11, 2011 and who are now members of the anti-nuclear movement.

They were able to see through the lies and the coverups and [00:43:00] were not prepared to accept that this time, with a triple meltdown happening in a technologically advanced country, it was just some aberration due to incompetent Russians or archaic Soviet technology, the excuses meted out to dismiss the Chernobyl disaster as a one-off.

So congratulations to Lebbly for holding the line so long. Sadly, she is never short of material, but I'm sure she joins me in wishing we could achieve our own obsolescence. We shouldn't still be having to fight this one. I'm Linda Pentz Gunter with *Beyond Nuclear*, reporting for *Nuclear Hotseat*. And that's this week's hot story.

**Libbe HaLevy:** And just when we've whet your appetite for Linda's Nuclear Hotseat hot story, she's taking a break of several weeks to go to the UK to promote her new book, No to Nuclear: Why Nuclear Power Destroys Lives, Derails Climate Progress, and Provokes War. But other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, what did you think of the play?[00:44:00]

Linda will be back with us in July Linda brought up Fukushima, and how many of us were glued to our computers to gain whatever information we could about the unfolding nuclear disaster. But one man was right in the middle of it all, Gregory Jaczko, who at the time was chair of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the NRC.

He relates what it was like for him to deal with the disaster from here in the United States, along with his observations on the overall advisability of nuclear technology. This is from Nuclear Hotseat number 395, January 16th, 2019.

**Gregory Jaczko:** So I first learned of the earthquake and the tsunami from a phone call from the operations center at the agency on that, it was early that Friday morning, and, , they told me that there had been an earthquake, there had been a tsunami, and, , we were looking to see if there was going to be an impact on plants on the West Coast of the United [00:45:00] States.

And it's one of those amazing facts that you could have an earthquake, , in the ocean close to Japan, and a tsunami wave could travel all the way across the Pacific Ocean and hit the West Coast of the US. So that was really the initial focus for me as, as that incident was developing. And then as the day went on, that transitioned once we knew in particular that the plants in California were fine, it started to transition to a recognition that something more severe was happening in Japan with their reactors.

**Libbe HaLevy:** When the accident began, you stated that while you saw your role in it as to provide support, guidance, and direction to Japan, and your position as the NRC, how open was Japan to that, and what kind of pressure were you under from the nuclear industry from the start to make the statement that everything was okay?

**Gregory Jaczko:** As the accident developed, Japan became more and more receptive to working with us and [00:46:00] open to us offering assistance and guidance. And I guess certainly as- as the accident began, my focus was on really deferring to them and, , because they were closest. They knew more about what was going on than we did, and certainly as the accident developed, everyone realized that none of us knew as much as we really needed to know.

So when I initially was confronted with the accident, I fell back to my training, which was really that in the event of an accident or some situation like this, you want to revert to the people who are closest to what's going on because they probably have the best information. And as the accident went on, then in some areas we started to diverge a little bit in terms of what we thought was happening, what we thought could happen, what the Japanese were doing, and, and I recount a few of those episodes in the book of times in which we made decisions and made recommendations that were different.

And, you know, that was something that, , you know, I did, and I did because we were looking at the information and making what we thought were the best decisions as possible. [00:47:00] Certainly after some of the public decisions were made, in particular the recommendation for 50-mile evacuation, the industry became a little more vocal in how they were reacting to what was going on and, and I think really began their efforts In the public media to try and paint as positive a picture of what was going on with the United States reactors

**Libbe HaLevy:** as they could.

Until Fukushima, the perceived wisdom in the nuclear industry was that a 10-mile evacuation radius from a nuclear accident would be sufficient. What led you to change that and declare a 50-mile evacuation zone from Fukushima for Americans in Japan?

**Gregory Jaczko:** We did really as an agency what we were trained to do, which was we ran analyses of the deteriorating condition of the reactors, and we plugged those into our models and our, our estimates of what we should do for an evacuation, and that's where we came up with the 50 miles.

Part of the challenge at that time was that our [00:48:00] inputs about what was going on were limited be- because we didn't have a lot of information about the plant, so we were making some, some judgments about what was going on, and, and that's how we came to our conclusions. You know, it was really the agency at its best doing what it was prepared to do, which was to take information, analyze that information, and make objective recommendations about what to do, and the ultimate conclusion we made was that if this plant were in the United States and we were getting the same information we were getting, we would be recommending a 50-mile evacuation.

We communicated that to the White House, and ultimately the White House agreed, and the president agreed, and the agency or the government went forward with that advice to Americans.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Greg Jaczko also had this to say, and remember, it's coming from the former head of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

**Gregory Jaczko:** There is a fundamental flaw in the technology and the design of these reactors. They really are built in such a way that you will always be on this precipice of, on the one side, safe operation, on the other side, accident, sometimes [00:49:00] catastrophic accident, and that's just the way that they are. One of the things that worries me right now is that so many people are looking at climate change and looking at nuclear as the solution, the silver bullet, if you will, for climate change, and I just think back to the Fukushima accident and realize that this is not a reliable technology.

If we pin our hopes for climate change on nuclear power, we're gonna lose in two ways. We're gonna probably have more accidents, and we're probably not gonna solve the climate puzzles. There are better ways to do this. There are cleaner technologies now that are cheaper, that are becoming more and more viable, and, you know, I think when you compare those to the challenges of nuclear power, it's obvious what the right solution is.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Former NRC commissioner Greg Jaczko. Fukushima, Three Mile Island, and Chernobyl were not the only locations for nuclear accidents. On the other end of the fuel chain from reactors and weapons is uranium mining, which comes with its own set of dangers and [00:50:00] disasters, frequently on indigenous lands. One you probably haven't heard of is the Church Rock uranium tailings pond spill on Navajo Nation land in New Mexico.

I was fortunate to attend the 40th anniversary commemoration of Church Rock, and was able to interview Larry J. King. He is a former uranium miner and witness to the start of this little-known nuclear accident. We spoke for Nuclear Hotseat number 473 on July 14, 2020. He worked on site at the United Nuclear Corporation mine on the day the tailings pond spill happened.

**Libbe HaLevy:** What did the company tell you about the danger of being around uranium, and any kind of safety practices that you should follow?

**Larry J. King:** Nothing. There was absolutely no forewarnings of what could come, how your health could be affected by being exposed to uranium, nothing.

The only time we had any kind of safety training [00:51:00] was at the beginning of the employment.

Just told us, "These are your safety apparatus, your safety boots, or your slickers," more like a raincoat and pants, "and your safety helmets with the underground lamp, gloves." That was it. So the only thing that I had to wear every day was the safety boots, and the hard hat, and the lamp, nothing else. Just about everybody was like that because it wasn't mandatory.

They didn't stress that you gotta wear this all the time. Respirators, nope, it was not.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Were there any radiation monitors around, or Geiger counters?

**Larry J. King:** They had a little object that they stuck inside our helmets, a dosimeter, and all I remember is it was placed in there, and I don't ever recall ev- being called in to get the recording or get it scanned, nothing.

And we were not [00:52:00] told how much exposures we had, nothing. Nothing at all

**Libbe HaLevy:** We then discussed the tailings pond and the early warning that was not heeded that something was terribly wrong.

**Larry J. King:** We drove over to the mill site, to the dam where the tailings dam were, and on the southern end of the tailings pond, I saw a lot of people there walking back and forth.

We drove up to where they were, and right away I noticed, , large cracks in the tailings dam, large enough to put your hand in there, but you can't see the bottom of it. It just went down, and it was black, so I couldn't see the bottom. There were several of them. I, I just wandered around there, and my supervisor was at a distance talking to other mining officials.

I'm sure they were the top brass for the company. I don't know if they were also from the New Mexico Environment Department. I don't know. But they were there for a long time. I don't know what their [00:53:00] conversation was. Then after that, we just got back in the vehicle. We just drove back to the mine site.

The dam was still holding.

**Libbe HaLevy:** So UNC knew that they had a problem and did nothing about it. At some point after that, Larry was not certain if it was days or as much as two weeks, everything changed.

**Larry J. King:** It wasn't until after 8:00, I don't know, about 9:00 by the time all the, , personnel had switched over from the graveyard shift to the day shift.

That's when I started hearing people talking among themselves that, "Did you see the dam? Did you see the dam?" So I didn't know what they were talking about. Eventually, I heard that the dam had broke. There was a huge gap in the dam. So when I got off after 2:00 and I was headed home and I look in that direction, and it's the exact same spot where I seen those huge cracks days before.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Did they tell you anything about it?

**Larry J. King:** No. Nobody told us anything. I didn't really pay attention to what was going on at that time because, I don't know if [00:54:00] the, the word is naive. I was a young kid at the time, just 23 years old, so I didn't really pay attention at all. I should have, but I didn't.

**Libbe HaLevy:** However, Larry did have insights into how UNC got away with their unsafe practices.

**Libbe HaLevy:** In the days that followed, was there any change in the way the company acted or the way they treated the miners, or

**Libbe HaLevy:** was there any kind of testing?

**Larry J. King:** No. It was just, , business as usual every day. I know there were safety policies in place because OSHA was there at the time. Every so often, the OSHA inspectors come in, and the way we knew it was days prior to them coming in, that's when they started barricading tunnels where they were not active to close off the radiation.

Vent bags with fans were extended up to about 20 feet to where the miners are working. So they fixed up everything.

**Libbe HaLevy:** They were staging it?

**Larry J. King:** Yeah, they were staging it to make it look [00:55:00] like the mine was in compliance with OSHA policies. So we knew the inspectors were

coming in, and sure enough, the next day they'd be wandering around, and I'm sure the mine got a passing grade, and within days, all those barricades that were put up, they came down.

**Libbe HaLevy:** Former uranium miner, Larry J. King. Sometimes protests against nukes are ignored by the government and the military, and sometimes oppositional violence escalates. The Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior, which was used in actions against French nuclear testing in the South Pacific, was blown up by French agents on July 10, 1985, killing photographer Fernando Pereira Kevin Hester was a young environmental and anti-nuclear activist working with Greenpeace at the time, and here he gives his account of the bombing and the aftermath, both his personal and [00:56:00] political observations.

From Nuclear Hotseat number 233 of December 9, 2015.

**Kevin Hester:** I stood on the wharf the night that the Rainbow was blown up, and I stood and cried watching her hanging on the side of the wharf drowning and knowing that Fernando was down below and, and had been murdered. And it's really important to remember that Fernando was murdered.

The French have tried to s- to say that it was th- they had never meant to hurt anyone, but there were two bombs exploded on the hull of the Warrior that night, a large one and a smaller one, and they were timed. There was a few minutes between when one bomb went off and when the other went off. And after the first bombing, Fernando went down below to his cabin to rescue his photographic equipment because he was the photographer on the Warrior.

And, , the second bomb detonated. It killed or knocked him out, and I think it knocked him out and Fernando drowned. But a really important detail that's much [00:57:00] understated about this situation was that Walter Lini, who was the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, he had sent down a government representative who was traveling on the Warrior at the time.

His name was Charles Rara, and Charles had a diplomatic passport, and a lot of us believe that it was an assassination attempt on Charles. Charles later died from cancer, and I, I, I suspect it was something to do with the atmospheric testing that had taken place up in the Pacific. But I really think it's important to remember that there was no warning that night for those bombs, and it was a really sophisticated attack that was launched on the, on the Warrior.

There were probably two dozen people involved in setting up the whole operation. Greenpeace was heavily infiltrated by agents. They sent a, a ship called the Ovea that came down from New Caledonia that had the inflatable [00:58:00] boat that they'd built in Lo- bought in London and the bombs that they used. And there was a large, a very large number of agents operating in Auckland.

Some of the agents went out, hired camper vans, and went to the Bay of Islands and to the north of New Zealand and made a, a rendezvous with the, the agents who had brought the weapons from, um, New Caledonia. And it was that... That was the place where the whole plot unraveled because people had noticed them acting strangely and ma- had made notes of it.

It was really wonderful piece of, , community policing that led to the capture of Dominique Prieur and Alain Mafart, the two people who murdered my comrade, Fernando, and literally got away with it. And that goes back to something you and I had talked before about David Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister, and my somewhat heated altercation that I had with him

**Libbe HaLevy:** Dominique Prieur and Alain Marfart, were they [00:59:00] operating by themselves or were they part of some larger plot, or were they sent by some entity?

**Kevin Hester:** They were sent by the French Secret Service, the DGSE, on the authority of Charles Hernu, who was the, the minister in charge, and right to the very top. Mitterrand knew that this operation was taking place. This was state-sanctioned terrorism that happened in New Zealand, sanctioned by, from the very top of the French government.

They came down with this big troop of people, and they were DGSE agents, secret service agents. We caught them. It was incredible. We caught them. But what happened after that is that an enormous amount of pressure was put on David Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister, , to free those two agents. David Lange was the Prime Minister, and my mother was David's electorate secretary, so he, she looked after his office and his little [01:00:00] electorate when he was electorate in Auckland.

And David was a regular visitor at our house, and I went round there only a few days after he had allowed Dominique Prieur and Alain Marfart, who had been sentenced to 10 years, I think, in jail in New Zealand. He gave them a pardon and let them go, and they went to Hao Atoll, another French Polynesian island paradise.

Instead of doing time for murdering Fernando in a New Zealand jail, they were on a, a beautiful paradise island in the Pacific. So it was all very convenient. And I went around to Mom and Dad's, and I saw David there, and I got talking, and I was young and angry and felt that we'd really been really hard done by, that these two murderers, terrorist murderers that we'd convicted in a court of law, were gonna be freed.

And David said to me, and I remember him pointing his fingers to me, and he said, "Kevin, the French have a gun to our heads, and they've already proven they will pull the trigger. We have to let them go, or they will crash our economy." [01:01:00] And that's what the French had said. They would stop all of our dairy products and, and meat and, , being imported into France and into the European community.

So it was, it was state terrorism and then a threat of state sanctions against us for convicting their terrorists.

**Libbe HaLevy:** New Zealand-based environmentalist, activist, and friend, Kevin Hester There are so many aspects to the show and what we've covered in the past 15 years. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 to Nihon Hidankyo, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Survivors Organizations, and in 2017 to ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

We've had interviews with the directors of many excellent films about nuclear issues, including SOS: The San Onofre Syndrome, First We Bombed in New Mexico, Atomic Bamboozle, Downwind, Cover Up, Radioactive, [01:02:00] and others And in memoriam for the passing of too many of our leading lights, including Michael Mariotte of NIRS, the astonishing Patty Amina, who took on the nuclear industry repeatedly by herself and won, Daniel Hirsch, whose UCLA students uncovered the nuclear meltdown at the LA area Santa Susana Field Lab after 20 years of cover-up, Gene Stone, who did such heart-centered, tireless work on the San Onofre closure, Mary Stamos of Three Mile Island, whose documentation of radiation-created plant mutations after that accident now live on at the Smithsonian, Mary Osco, who grew up next to the radiologically contaminated Coldwater Creek in North St.

Louis and died of its consequences, Jim Hettle, director of SOS, the San Onofre Syndrome, and many others. Every one of them is missed for their [01:03:00] unique contribution, and we're grateful that all of them are commemorated here in the interviews they granted me on Nuclear Hotseat. And now for my personal glimpse of the future.

You may not be aware of it, but in my past life, meaning before nuclear, I worked professionally in theater as a much-produced playwright and head of a musical theater development organization. One legacy of Nuclear Hotseat is that it has informed and inspired the writing of my new play, Atomic Bill and the Payment Due.

It's an Oppenheimer-adjacent true story about media manipulation at the dawn of the atomic age, the New York Times reporter who sold his soul to get the story, and the podcaster obsessed with taking him down. Part biographical, part documentary, all of it dramatic, the play was presented in a staged reading at the 400-seat theater in Wilmington, Ohio, for the Wilmington College [01:04:00] Peace Resource Center as a centerpiece of their 50th anniversary celebration.

Now, just this week, it has been given a special script award by the International Uranium Film Festival, with founder Marcia Gomez de Oliveira calling it, quote, "A future piece of great importance. This is a story that needs to be seen." We'll have a link up to the festival's full announcement on our website, nuclearhotseat.com, under this episode number 781.

The play is available for readings, staged readings, and a full production, so if you are a theater, are connected to a theater, know people involved with theater, or have an idea of how to help move this forward, get in touch with me at info@nuclearhotseat.com. And as a final thought, I'll leave you with something I said at the end of Nuclear Hotseat number one.

**Libbe HaLevy:** The thing that has haunted me from the start is that [01:05:00] I believe that in all honesty, the nature of life on Earth just changed.

**Dr. Helen Caldicott:** Yeah.

**Libbe HaLevy:** I believe, and it scares me to even say this and put this out, but this is what has been haunting me, and I, I need to get it out there, that we live in a time that a science fiction book would refer to as that time when everything had already changed, only people were too scared, too ignorant, or too arrogant to understand, and they pretended and acted as if everything was still normal when it wasn't.

And-

**Libbe HaLevy:** Right ...

**Libbe HaLevy:** that's why I want to do this. I don't even know what this is, but I'm willing to hang out with the process, make it available, make it a little more visible next time around maybe.

**Garrett Graff:** -h .

**Libbe HaLevy:** And do my little bit to get the word out and help raise [01:06:00] people's awareness that we do not need to panic. We do need to act.

**Libbe HaLevy:** True then, true now. This has been Nuclear Hotseat for Tuesday, June 16th, 2026. If you'd like to get Nuclear Hotseat delivered via email every week, fill out the yellow opt-in box on our website, nuclearhotseat.com, and you'll get the show delivered every week. If you've got a story lead, a hot tip, or a suggestion of someone to interview, send that to us in an email at nuclearhotseat.com.

And remember, if you can go to Nuclear Hotseat and donate, thank you. Any amount helps, and it's a great way to celebrate our anniversary. This episode of Nuclear Hotseat is copyright 2026 Libbe HaLevy and Nuclear Hotseat. All rights reserved, but fair use allowed, as long as you cite the program, website, names of guests whose comments you use, and [01:07:00] me.

For now, this is Libbe HaLevy of Nuclear Hotseat reminding you the last thing anyone who opposes nuclear wants to be able to say is, "I told you so And there you have it. 15 years down and who knows how many to go. Your weekly nuclear wake-up call. So whatever you do, don't go back to sleep because we are all in the Nuclear Hotseat