

Museum on Main Street, Smithsonian Institution

## Violet Spolarich on fighting pipelines and protecting water in her rural community

As told by Violet Spolarich

Palisade, Minnesota

Story Narrative:

"My name is Violet Spolarich, and I live at Palisade, in Aitkin County. I always have to brag to the fact that I've lived in on the Willow River for 85 years. Our home was on the banks of the Willow River, a little, old, wooden house. One reason I'm so proud about living on the Willow River all my life is the wildlife. I've seen moose, I've seen timber wolves. Any kind of animal you can think of, I've seen from my window. Just all the important things in life that we should be able to protect and take care of and love, and I love all those kind of things. About four or five years ago, a company who wanted to put a \$93 million garbage dump in Palisade, and it would've been 25 truckloads of garbage a day coming into our town. First, the smoke stack would've been 80 feet high. Well then it went down, down, down, and every time they lied, it went down a little further. Then it was supposed to be 27% tires coming in, and burning in our town.

Well, we fought really hard. I was kind of the leader of the charge, so I wasn't very popular with a lot of people. I got called a lot of names for it, and I didn't care. A gal up town that had restaurant, she met me one day at a big meeting. She put her finger in my face, and she told me I'd better get an education. If I wanted to lead people, I'd better be educated for it. She called me an uneducated fool trying to lead people. Well, that didn't go over too good, but I didn't really mind that too bad, because some of the other names I got was not too good either. We worked hard to stop that, and we did get it stopped.

We're so thankful now that we don't have to worry about that. It was right on the banks of the Mississippi practically, and it would've been a 40 acre garbage dump. One thing we found was that they think that little towns are okay to do that kind of thing. 'When big don't towns want them, send it on down to a little town.' We were promised new streets, new this, new that, new bridge and all that. Well, we didn't get the garbage dump, and we still got the new streets, the new street lights, a bridge and everything else. So it doesn't depend on somebody else's garbage being hauled in a hundred miles. We want to keep our town clear, clean, and free.

Two years ago, we were back to kind of the same situation. Enbridge wanted to put their pipeline through here. Where I live, the pipeline, they surveyed right by my bedroom window. Just right by the bedroom window. Then it would've gone over and

across the Willow River, just across the field. Then across the Mississippi River, across the rice paddies. Getting back to Enbridge, they have one of the worst track records that I ever heard of, for the rotten way they do these things. North of Grand Rapids, they still have spills from 10, 15 years ago, where they never did clean it up.

A lot of people around, farmers, I won't mention any names, sold the rights to their land. They sold it all to this pipeline company. Thinking, that well if a few did it, everybody would do it. They think because we're a small community, that we'll take all this stuff, we could maybe get a few bucks out of it, but they found out that people won't do that. We had one meeting where they were 48 people from the township there, voting on the rights to let these people do some of this stuff. Four people voted for it, and 44 voted against it. There's no price worth ruining our land for it. I don't care what anybody says, there's no right, and our rivers and our lakes.

Aitkin County is all a lot of lowland. That water, the water level is so high that everything would seep into it. We just don't need that, and we have to protect all that. Everything drains into the Willow River and the Mississippi River, and all these beautiful lakes that people, they love and that's their home. They don't want (inaudible 00:04:32) taken any worse, and they don't want somebody to come in any place else and ruin it for them. We just can't afford that. We don't want that, and as long as I can fight, and the rest of us, we're not going to have it."

This story was collected as part of a collaborative effort to record the state of American lakes, rivers, and waterways as well an attempt to uncover what water means to Americans. Listen to other stories recorded for the [Be Here: Main Street](#) project, a collaboration with the MuseWeb Foundation to record stories from rural America.

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