

**Submission
No 1**

FORMER URANIUM SMELTER SITE, HUNTER'S HILL

Name: Ms Katie McGrath

Date received: 24/06/2008

Submission on behalf of : Katie & Greg McGRATH
Former residents of : Nelson Parade, Hunters Hill.
Duration of residence : Approx 1972-1974.

Until reading a newspaper article earlier this year, we'd been unaware that a Uranium smelter was once located in Nelson Parade, Hunters Hill – despite having lived there as children. For us, this was the missing piece of a thirty five year old puzzle, a revelation that finally made sense of our trampled lives.

The deaths of our parents, Iris and Fabian McGrath, from leukaemia and stomach cancer, nine months apart in 1975, we'd been forced to attribute to a wretched coincidence. Aged in their thirties, there was talk of some kind of genetic flaw on both sides of the family, despite there being no family history of either disease. None of it made any real sense, until the Sydney Morning Herald revealed our family had been living on top of a radioactive waste dump.

Since then, we have obtained access to formerly confidential correspondence from the Dept. of Health (via the Freedom of Information Act), going back over many years. It was, to put it politely, a profound and disturbing shock to learn of the Dept's clandestine intent to keep the street's deadly and radioactive past from the public (ie: residents). The Dept. of Health asserts it continued over the years to monitor radiation levels in Nelson Parade, and that there was no substantial risk or need to inform residents of the waste buried beneath them – despite the unusually high number of deaths on the waterfront side of the street. To find out now that their 'tests' involved – and *still do* involve – the waving of Geiger counters **over the surface of the soil** is deplorable, the worst kind of deceit. Unfortunately, for our parents and a number of other residents who made the uninformed mistake of digging beneath the topsoil (in our parents' case, to build retaining walls and plant out vegetable gardens), they are not here to point out the Dept. of Health's heinous deception.

As orphans, it difficult for us to understand that our parents' deaths could have been avoided, and that someone in a government department actually decided it was poor fiscal policy to warn residents before moving into the street. For the McGrath family, or those of us left, this is a cover up that is beyond despicable, that is immoral, evil, and even murderous, since the Department of Health intentionally withheld the truth from us.

The financial, emotional and psychological impact on our family has been incalculable. Of the four children of Iris and Fabian, aged between 3 and 12 in 1975, some were old enough to watch their parents wither and die excruciating deaths, visiting them in hospitals every night after school. Others never had the chance to know them at all, too young to remember. Each of us has been exposed to foster homes and, to put it mildly, far from ideal circumstances. And although we do not wish to publish those details in this forum, it is unlikely that, had our parents survived, any of us would have, for instance, been forced to share a filthy half-way house for prostitutes, drug addicts and parolees in their teenage years. It was certainly a long way from the waterfront at Hunters Hill. Another of us, our eldest brother, did not survive the grief and recklessness of his youth at all. Further, only one of us, the youngest, has ever had children, for we had always believed that since both our parents died from cancer in their thirties, it was highly probable we would do the same, and could not bring ourselves to risk leaving children of our own behind.

We'll never get our childhood back, or the lives we might have lived, however, we owe it to our parents to bring to light the appalling injustice that has occurred here. It is time this cover-up was ended and we received a formal apology from the Department of Health. It is also time they raised the issue of compensation to the residents effected.