

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with
Paul Colbert

July 12, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

© 2007 by UNLV Libraries

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews conducted by an interviewer/researcher with an interviewee/narrator who possesses firsthand knowledge of historically significant events. The goal is to create an archive which adds relevant material to the existing historical record. Oral history recordings and transcripts are primary source material and do not represent the final, verified, or complete narrative of the events under discussion. Rather, oral history is a spoken remembrance or dialogue, reflecting the interviewee's memories, points of view and personal opinions about events in response to the interviewer's specific questions. Oral history interviews document each interviewee's personal engagement with the history in question. They are unique records, reflecting the particular meaning the interviewee draws from her/his individual life experience.

Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project

Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor

Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators

Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology

Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

The material in the *Nevada Test Site Oral History Project* archive is based upon work supported by the U.S. Dept. of Energy under award number DEFG52-03NV99203 and the U.S. Dept. of Education under award number P116Z040093.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these recordings and transcripts are those of project participants—oral history interviewees and/or oral history interviewers—and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Energy or the U.S. Department of Education.

Interview with Paul Colbert

July 12, 2004
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Table of Contents

Introduction: born Louisville, KY, work and travels as environmental engineer, move to Las Vegas, NV to work for Franciscan homeless project and NDE (1999)	1
Monastic journey: foreign travels, social action, joins Order of the Holy Cross, participation in Lenten Desert Experience (LDE) at the NTS (1991)	2
First impressions of the NTS (1991)	4
Involvement with Nevada Desert Experience (NDE), Las Vegas, NV (beginning 1999)	5
Background: education (engineering, North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina), work in Africa, pursuit of monastic vocation	6
Decision to leave the monastery, philosophy of the NDE and faith-based opposition to weapons testing	7
Dialogues with Robert Nelson, Episcopal priest and test site official, NDE and NTS protest movement	8
Relationships with test site law enforcement	9
Western Shoshone passports to enter NTS during protests	13
The impact of being arrested for the first time for nonviolent protest	15
Nonviolent protest at various sites across the country	17
Challenges: the NTS and NDE protest movement, NTS workers, community opposition to protest movement	19
Details of scheduled NTS protest (August 2004)	25
Thoughts on the future of the NTS and testing, resurgence of protest movement	26
Impact of the protest movement on the NTS	28
Thoughts on the NTS from an engineering standpoint: infrastructure, environmental cleanup, waste disposal, alternate use, Area 51	29
The NTS: secrecy vs. informing the public	32
Thoughts on Yucca Mountain project and involvement of NDE	34
NDE and involvement with environmental efforts	36
Conclusion: final thoughts on the NDE	37

Interview with Paul Colbert

July 12, 2004 in Las Vegas, NV

Conducted by Suzanne Becker

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disk 1.

Suzanne Becker: *If you want to start with something about yourself, some background, where you're from, where your family's from, where you grew up, and maybe how you eventually ended up here in Nevada.*

Paul Colbert: OK. Well, given that some claim that I *haven't* grown up, that may be difficult but I'm Paul Colbert. Born in Louisville, Kentucky. I'm a migrant worker. I've got six countries and seven states to my name at this point. Lived in the north of Ireland and in the Yemen Arab Republic, the Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, doing various types of engineering work. I've been in several different states. I came to Las Vegas in 1999 to work primarily with Brother David [Buer] of the Franciscans and his project for the homeless, but that also gave me the opportunity to work with Nevada Desert Experience [NDE], preparing for the millennial event at New Year's 1999. We had about five hundred people involved with the Nevada Desert Experience for a program in town, and then greeted the New Year out at the test site, alternative to what's going on, on the Strip.

Right. Little bit of a different scene.

Some of my background. I'm an environmental engineer by training, registered engineer still in North Carolina and also was registered for a while in California.

So what does that mean specifically, environmental engineer? I'm curious.

Water supplies, sanitation, public health types of engineering, which is focusing on public health for developing countries. That was part of what took me abroad, was doing engineering work in

those countries. Worked in a refugee camp in the Sudan for a while, the Ethiopian famine relief. *Very* basic public health, in that regard.

I first came out here and first got involved with Nevada Desert Experience in 1991. At that point, I was in the Order of the Holy Cross, which is an Episcopal Benedictine monastic community. I was in Berkeley, California and I came down for the Lenten Desert Experience in 1991, which was the tenth anniversary of Nevada Desert Experience.

So prior to coming out here, you'd been involved with the test site.

I had been for, well, that would be about eight years off and on that I'd been out here, probably about four or five times, before moving out here and getting more directly involved with [the] organizing and planning unit.

What initially spurred that involvement?

It was kind of a crazy combination of things. In some ways, I still haven't figured it out. Back in 1981, I was in the Yemen Arab Republic, involved overseas, and I was aware of mounting opposition worldwide against nuclear weapons. Those were the days that Reagan was proposing the neutron bomb and making things even worse by way of nuclear escalation. Even while the SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] talks were going on, there was still talk of new generations of weapons and so on. So I was aware of some of that aspect, but a lot of it was complex enough that I didn't have time to sort through all the details myself. While I was in the refugee camp in the Sudan, that was '85, '86, one of my coworkers there was taking a sabbatical from the SALT talks, where she was one of the primary translators, Russian and English translators, and had her picture in the paper that she was one that the State Department and Ronald Reagan had in mind, when they'd do the translation, she was one of the chief translators for summit talks.

Who was that?

Her name was Carolyn Smith. I've lost touch with her, don't know where she is. I think she's back at work doing some of that type of work, but don't know for sure. But it was interesting to hear from her perspective in terms of just the *drudgery* of translating documents. They'd take Russian documents, translate it into English, and then *back* into Russian, and *vice versa*, just to make sure that things were accurately being translated. Because a lot of the [00:05:00] language of these documents is very technical and can make or break a treaty, you know, based on one false interpretation. So that was an intriguing aspect of it.

But I think part of what happened in my monastic journey, as I was entering more deeply into prayer and contemplation, was also a call to be more involved actively. So I was still kind of at the center but the margins were widening, from my perspective. I came *to* the test site the first time with some Episcopal seminarians who were in Berkeley at the time, and we came down to see what was happening at the test site and to be involved with the Lenten Desert Experience. And as an aside, that was the year Dom Helder Camara was here for that event, a Brazilian Roman Catholic cleric. And amongst other quotes on his involvement in the Church, he's been quoted as saying, *When I fed the hungry, they called me a saint. When I asked why they were hungry, they called me a Communist.* But he was here and speaking at the event. Dan Berrigan was out here at that time. And I mention those two because a couple years later, in '93 on Good Friday at Lawrence Livermore labs, I crossed the line there, and was wearing my monastic habit, my white habit—stood out from the brown Franciscan habits—and Martin Sheen looked at me as I had crossed the line. He says, *Oh, Brother,* he says, *I remember you.* We were in the desert together a couple years ago, Dom Helder Camara and Dan Berrigan. So he was here in '91 as well, and in some ways, thinking of that story is part of what helped bring me to Las Vegas, was saying, *I don't hang out with*

those folks often enough. There have been a number of prominent people who've come out here to protest at the test site.

That's what I've heard.

So that's some of what got me out here. My monastic journey, where I was getting more involved with the social action as well as the prayer life, and this has been a way to blend the two. It's been a matter of being out here in the desert to pray for the restoration of the land, and it's one of those things where the *science* and the *religion* almost are kind of counterintuitive and almost oppose each other that, you know, this radiation is going to be around *forever*.

Nevertheless, to be called to pray for the restoration of the land, to pray to overcome the desecration of the land.

So I guess I couple of questions. I'm just wondering first when you actually got out to the test site? What were your first impressions and what were your thoughts, I guess, when you were out there that time?

Well, several aspects. One is the sheer beauty of the land. This country, it's something you have to have *lived* in the desert for a while to appreciate certain desert landscapes and so on. I mean, a good part of Tanzania, the Yemen, those were all different aspects of desert landscapes. Some of this was highlighted one year when I took a tour of the test site, I think in '93—it might've been '94—that I took a tour of the test site, and that was organized as part of an NDE event, and there were a couple on there who were from the East Coast and had *never* been to the desert before, and overhearing their comments on it, Look at all this desecration. This is all because of the bomb. There are no trees. There's no nothing. And I was sort of saying, Well, you know, much as the land's been desecrated, this is as good as it gets. This is the rainy season. The belly flowers are in bloom. I mean, you've got to have an eye to see it, but, you know, the lack of vegetation

wasn't due to the bomb. I've got to admit that. But the sheer [00:10:00] beauty of the landscape out there is a very powerful witness. And that's part of the aspect in terms of setting up Nevada Desert Experience, was to help people have the experiential element to see the beauty of the land and recognize what it is that's happening to Mother Earth.

Right. Yes. So it was fairly powerful.

It was a powerful experience. It was good to encounter that. At the same time, I chose *not* to risk arrest at that time, and part of that got into the aspect of societal demands of being a proper Episcopalian, not to enter into these things. Actually, I returned from that first experience and found out that I was in the process of transferring my professional engineering license to California, and that meant I had to take a seismic engineering exam and a survey exam, on top of the national standards.

So for practical reasons, it just wasn't a good time to be arrested.

Actually, when I got back, I found out that I had *not* passed the seismic test that first time and I needed to take it away [again?], and at the bottom of the reapplication, it said to certify that I had not been arrested. And I said, oh, OK. I dare say that from an engineering point of view on protecting the health and safety of the *public*, I can make a strong case for protesting as a way of trying to protect the public safety and health. That's disputed by many other engineers who *work* for the government, most of whom are *not* in fact licensed.

Right. Interesting. So eventually, how did you come to be involved with the Nevada Desert Experience? I mean, you came out here in '91 and—

I'd been out here several times in the meantime. Back in '98, I'd been away from the monastery. I'd left the monastery about two years previously, and had taken some simple jobs, just trying to figure where in the world that I want to be and what in the world that I need to be *doing* at that

point. And the director's position for Nevada Desert Experience was open, and I applied for that. Actually came in second on that; somebody else got the job. But that's when Brother David offered me the position to help him with the homeless project he's doing here at this location, actually. The building we're in, this *was* the Franciscan friary. The Franciscans lived here from about 1980 until early this year, and the three buildings on this property at present are being used for three of the different ministries they had started. One was Nevada Desert Experience, one is Pace e Bene Franciscan Nonviolence Center, the other is Poverella House, which is the house of hospitality for the homeless. And so that's what I had come out here to do *directly* at that time, and then had the opportunity to start working with NDE for the millennium event, and then helping out from time to time since then. And I guess, going back to about 2001 at this point, that I'd worked as office manager and tried to keep some things going at various times when NDE's struggled for finances, so it's sort of been on again, off again, depending on how the funding's been available.

And so you are now currently the director?

I'm a program director and office manager, just part time work. The youth director up in Berkeley is a full time position. Outreach director and youth director.

I guess a couple questions, and I'll start here first. I want to just back up a little bit, because you mentioned being at the monastery and I'm wondering what the progression was. Obviously, you went to school for engineering?

Yes.

And where did you do that?

I was at North Carolina State for undergraduate and University of North Carolina for graduate school.

OK. And then what was the progression from there that led you—?

Oh, I don't know that anything's been direct. Part of it, in doing the engineering work, I felt [00:15:00] called to ordination, which I pursued in North Carolina. That didn't happen at that point. I felt drawn to do overseas missionary work, which people didn't seem to understand very much. They said, well, just do the engineering. And so some of my additional work in Tanzania and the Sudan were sort of, in some ways, an attempt to show that they were wrong. I was trying to do the engineering work, but it really was not fully satisfying in that aspect, and ordination would've proved very fruitful in that realm. And then entering the monastery to pursue the monastic vocation, which I'd always had in the back of my mind, and it became obvious that wasn't where I needed to spend the rest of my life. That wasn't the group of people that I needed to spend the rest of my life with, so I left the monastery. So it's been a progression, a lot of social action that I've been involved with in various phases, various levels, but it's part of my Christian baptismal covenant.

So these are just values that are part of your upbringing and that have been present in your life throughout.

Yes. Exactly. Yes.

And the second thing, I'm just wondering if you could just briefly lay out the, I guess you'd call it the philosophy of Nevada Desert Experience and what the group itself—sort of a condensed version of what you guys do.

Well, yeah, we're faith-based opposition to nuclear weapons in general, nuclear testing in particular, the idea being that the testing is a key component in nuclear weapons, and by eliminating the testing phase, that would start eliminating the weapons and new generations weapons. Now, obviously, there's a new generation of weapons on the drawing board right now

and plans going ahead to build mini-nukes and bunker busters that have just recently been approved. But the faith-based opposition, following in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King and, I mean, ultimately of Jesus in terms of nonviolent confrontation, so it's been a series of *witnessing* against weapons and trying to engage the opponent. Various times there have been engagements with the test site workers and dialogues going on with them about various activities that have gone on there.

Can you talk a little bit about that? I'm curious how the test site received you guys and types of interactions you've had.

Some of this is getting oral history before my time, but it's been a variety of aspects. Some of that came about by holding signs outside the entrance so that workers would see it as they went by. Other times there were blockades—people getting off the buses and having a chance to interact with the workers out there. There have been interactions with people, and I understand it wasn't well received by a lot of workers, but one of the safety directors, later the test site director, Bob Nelson, helped to encourage dialogue. Now, this is the dynamics of things in acting. Bob is an ordained Episcopal priest, as am I, and I had to get his approval to get *ordained*, as a matter of fact.

Right. I believe we talked about Nelson.

But he helped promote some of the dialogue, and I gather that he was better received by the Nevada Desert Experience than he was by some of his coworkers in doing that. But many who just didn't want to have any dialogue whatsoever and, *we're right and they're wrong*. Attitudes which you find on both sides of any issue. So he helped to organize various times when there could be dialogues. There were times, I think, he invited folks to come and make presentations at the church where he was based, which was the church home to a number of test

site workers, so it wasn't just matter of getting in the church, but it was actively where the test site workers were worshipping.

So what have your experiences been? Have you had, I guess, dialogue with test site folks or test site workers?

Not directly. My contact in my position has been more with the sheriff, in terms of organizing the protests better.

OK. [James] Merlino?

[00:20:00] I met him, but I've mainly worked with Captain Mike Bordner, has been my primary contact. He's the current person in charge out at the Mercury substation.

So how does that generally work?

Actually, it's gotten to the point, I don't know if we've got them trained too well or if he's trying to work on duty rosters two months in advance, but he usually ends up calling me before I get to calling him. But we usually indicate that—because part of our nonviolent principles to which we subscribe is that we share our activities with the—I mean, the basics. We don't go into all the details, but we share the basics with the sheriff and let them know. For instance, this August, we will be out there on Sunday, August the eighth. We plan to be out there for liturgy about eight o'clock, which means we'd be starting to head down to the line somewhere around nine o'clock, and we give them an idea of roughly how many we're expecting. That helps him with his manpower report, so that he can determine how many people are coming and, being a Sunday, he'll probably take the day off if it's a small enough group. If there's too many coming out there, then he'll be more directly involved. So it's been a matter of coordinating some of those efforts, and periodically I'll get a phone call. I think, for instance, there were big protests in San Francisco against Bechtel. Now, of course, this is partially Bechtel Nevada, so on that group's

website, they said, you know, we're going to do things against all the Bechtel sites. Well, I think they were thinking San Francisco when they said that. They were going to all the places in San Francisco, but since this is a Bechtel site, he called up to find out, were we part of this group? Did I know anything about it? And that was the first I had *heard* about it, as a matter of fact, so there was nothing going on at this site, to my knowledge; certainly nothing that involved us. So it's a matter of coordinating on these things. Some that ties in with the fact that a lot of it's very ritual[ized]—the protests—and there's been a varied history in terms of how much has gone on with prosecution of various charges. That's varied over the years and there seem to be a variety of experiences on that, but for the *basic actions* that go on right now, that are more ritual, where we cross the line, the sheriff does what I call the sports fisherman approach of catch and release: Basically, as we cross the line, we're detained in the holding cages that are out there at the entrance to the test site. You've seen those?

Yes.

Yeah, you're familiar with those. And then after everybody has crossed the line, everybody that they're *aware* of at that point that has crossed the line, then they'll start processing and booking. They write a citation that says, "Court date to be notified." And then they never actually even file the charges.

So they go through the motions.

It goes through the motions.

And do they just process you right there?

Right there, yeah. Basically, they'll bring the police car over, write the citation, and then people walk back across the line. So it's very simple catch-and-release aspect at this point. If people were to do a *backcountry* action to try to walk in, deep into the test site, that would be a more

serious situation in their eyes that charges would probably be filed. There was a group that was in Mercury, oh, probably about eighteen months ago who was caught *in* the town of Mercury, and again, it's one of those dilemmas that, for whatever reason, DOE [Department of Energy] has contracted with Nye County to protect the test site, by and large. At certain levels, Wackenhut [Services, Incorporated] private security force does a lot of the other levels of security. If you're out on the grounds, it's generally treated as a county offense. A state offense. If you're caught in a building, this is generally considered a federal offense at that point.

So this is really organize—almost a hierarchical order for this.

They've kind of developed it, and part of that is in response to protesters, part of that was developed over the years in terms of what they're going to contract for. One of the suspicions on [00:25:00] why they don't want to prosecute is Nye County doesn't get a huge amount of money to do their work out there, and the more they prosecute, the less profit they get out of it, so they've got a monetary issue of not prosecuting, and that's been considered from time to time by protesters. *If* it seems like an appropriate time to up the ante and draw attention to the issue, *forcing* prosecutions by increased presence could be a strategy that might get more media attention, might draw attention to it. And Nye County may or may not—it depends on what their strategy is in terms of following through on that. Do they have enough money to prosecute?

Right. [It] doesn't seem like there's much of a need for that right now, is that—?

No, things are kind of mixed right now. Part of this gets into the global strategy, the weapons of mass *distraction*, you know. The sleight of hand that the weapons we've been searching for are over *there*, whereas in fact they exist in *this* country and are on hair trigger alert, you know, so that's a part of the aspect. And as time goes on, certainly with the sixtieth anniversary of the bomb next year and with increased funding for new generations of weapons, the intention is to

increase publicity around nuclear weapons in *this* country over the course of the next year. That ought to increase media attention, but may or may not be anything increased by way of strategy and arrests.

OK. I mean, that's really interesting. It just supersedes it.

Way too early to tell at this point.

Right. I'd like to go back to something you mentioned just a little earlier about the things that are fairly ritualized right now, and I've read this book by Ken [Butigan].

You've seen that one. OK. I wasn't sure if you had seen that or not.

And in there, he talks a lot about the different rituals and what different things mean. I'm wondering if you could expand on that or share your experiences with me. I know that crossing the actual cattle guard or the line, I guess, what it is now, has a very significant meaning to—

Well, yeah, I asked Captain Mike one day, I said, Now, you've replaced the cattle guard with a line. How do you guys refer to it, just so that we're clear in our communications? He says, That's still the cattle guard. The *line* is down halfway to Mercury, which is where the old camp was, and that *used* to be where the protests were held.

And so when they talk among themselves about crossing the line, they think somebody's down in there a ways.

It's good to get that language clarified.

So communications are important there. They still refer to it as the cattle guard. It would be interesting to go out there with a GPS [global positioning system] system and determine, is that actually NTS property, or what they claim to be NTS property, because I think the Shoshone issue still needs to be addressed on the whole thing, who really owns the land. They don't have title to it. But that's a different level of issue and protest. It's become at least the symbolic boundary that the government says, You're not allowed to be here. And by and large,

people were saying, *Yes, we are*. Now, one of the levels of which that claim is made is that most actions, people have a permit from the Western Shoshone to come and go on Shoshone lands. And so that's been *one* of the claims that has been made over the years. And in fact, around the time that those first started being issued was around the same time that a lot of the prosecutions were being stopped. Whether it's direct cause and effect, it seems like there are several different related issues going on at that same time, budget being one of them, media coverage being another. There were several things happening around that same time. But part of it's a matter of saying, *No, we disagree with the policies and we're going to claim the right to be here and protest*. And so it's gone fairly well [00:30:00] in that aspect, and a fair bit of respect. A lot of people out there greet the officers by name.

So it seems like you have a very good working relationship with the security out there.

By and large there, yes, and part of what they've asked for as part of this aspect has been to let them know if there are people, unknown to us—you know, if there's outside agitators, people who haven't been involved with the weekend event or who are unknown in terms of trainings—because that helps *them* that they know that we've got a record of being nonviolent and treating people with respect. We don't know about these folks. And that's all it is, is a heads-up. And it's a way of saying, *I'm not responsible for the actions of anybody who's out there*. *I'm simply trying to coordinate things, whereas they would like to deal with a hierarchy and say, who gives the orders here? That's not the way we operate*. And that's part of the difference between the modes of operation and the challenge to, I guess, to the federal government as a *whole* throughout the nation, is we've got two different *ways* of doing things that are emerging in this country. People still want this strong hierarchy to deal with, and a lot of people are saying, *No, we're wanting to be a democracy*. We're wanting to have a

say. So it's tricky in that regard to balance, but at least in terms of trying to honor them and let them be aware how they're going to deal with people who might be acting out or acting up in some way, that they have to have their own levels of protection for that, so it's a way of honoring them at that level.

OK. Now, how do you decide? Do you decide that morning if you're going to go ahead and cross, or do you decide it beforehand?

A lot of individuals decide—I mean a lot of people decide that morning that they cross. A lot of people come out here having a *sense* of what they want to do, but then, whether they get caught in the moment, to make their final decision or not on whether to cross the line or not.

And then what is that symbolic representation?

A *lot* of it has to do with, for the individuals who cross, it gets into *lots* of different levels of things. For some people, it's a level of respecting authority and saying, *Good* people don't get arrested. You know, the air of propriety *versus* dealing with, for instance, attitudes towards civil disobedience, *Good* people *ought* to be in jail rather than people *ought not* to be in jail, you know, looking at *Walden* and some of those historical aspects. So for a lot of people, that's part of the decision. It is respectability and dealing with authority. There are some folks who come out here, we've had people out here who are actually *on* active duty in the *military*, that it would not be wise for them to get a jail record. But they recognize the way things are done out here, it's a safe environment, that they are *not* going to appear on any record entered into a database. So it's a way of making a stand and a witness that, even though they're on active duty and serving in the armed forces for their country, there are some things that they disagree with, and they recognize, and this is a way that they can go ahead and express it in a relatively anonymous fashion. I mean, depending on what name they actually

give when they're cited out, but even if they give their own name. It's not something that's going to appear, that the military police are going to suddenly come down on them. So it's a way for them to deal with some of the contradictions that they're facing in their lives and to try to get a little bit of integration out of it.

Sort of reconcile things a little bit?

Right. And like I say, a lot of people, the first time of being arrested here, even though the repercussions are small, psychologically it's a big deal for them. And actually the example, talking with Steve Kelly, a Jesuit who had been out here many times, [00:35:00]—and I crossed the line with him in Livermore in '93—and he did not carry any identification with him when he was arrested at Livermore. That was Good Friday. And that meant—he was bound over for the whole weekend until Monday, so he missed Easter celebrations with community and so on—that he was in jail for Easter. But his comment was, I'm just practicing. I'm practicing to know what it's like to be in jail because I haven't experienced that part yet. I'm practicing because I don't know where in the world I'm going to go with the Jesuits. And this was in '93 and, if memory serves me correctly, it was 1990 that the Jesuits were killed in El Salvador, which is a place that he might've ended up. So for him, especially, this had some real significance on testing himself in the ways of nonviolence, testing himself on, Can I do jail time? Where is my witness? And in fact, he has since gone on to do Ploughshares actions where he, I think at one point, was sentenced to six years for one of his actions, protesting the nuclear missiles. So he's gone on to test himself, and that motto has always meant something to me: Just testing, and testing myself. I'm called to take a stand, but there are repercussions to taking stands, and am I ready for it?

So there's definitely a spiritual element involved, practical and spiritual, I guess.

Indeed. And for some people, that involves crossing the line; other people, it doesn't. There was a Buddhist weekend, I'm thinking in 2001; it might've been 2002, and most of those who were on that weekend, when they went out on Sunday, they had pretty much decided on Saturday that their witness was going to be simply to say their prayers and be a prayerful presence outside the line, and not to cross the line. Nevertheless, once they got out there, there was one person who indicated that he had a personal need to go ahead and cross. And they were able to accept that and wait for him while he crossed and did his steps. This was a person who had worked out there as a subcontractor years and years earlier. His spiritual journey had taken him to the point that he needed to—rather than working in support of—he needed to now take a stand against. So that was his personal journey that others had embraced. We had one weekend, a small witness in August, where one person who came had never crossed the line, and throughout the weekend was feeling more and more a desire that it would be nice. And yet as we had the conversations about what we wanted to do the next day, the initial reaction that people had was, *I don't need to do this. I don't need to cross the line. My statement is strong enough without it.* And we went around, and most everybody basically was in agreement. *None* of us *needed* to cross the line, including the one who hadn't crossed for the first time. However, she said, *I don't need to, but this is my first experience to do it and I would like to.* And as it turned out, I forget, there were about ten or twelve of us who were out there, a small group at that time, *all* of us crossed the line. So we had 100 percent participation, which was, I think, a first for us—that *everybody* who was there crossed the line.

So, in a sense, too, it's almost a—I don't know if rite of passage is the correct term, but it seems to have maybe a little bit of a—

It's very close, yes, I think that's a very apt description for it. Comments have been made around the country—I don't know if you've seen on our website our principles of nonviolence.

Yes.

You've probably got—not having the computer set up, I can't get them to you right away, so yeah, you've got access to them. Those have been used and adapted at many places around the [00:40:00] country, including the School of the Americas. Yet my observation from various places, we provide some of the most involved or intense—or incorporate the most elements of nonviolence into our weekends in various ways, shapes, and forms, and yet have seemingly the least need *for* it. Because the aspect of crossing the line at the School of the Americas, where you're met by armed guards and so on and arrested—and these days just about everybody faces three months in jail just for crossing the line—the ante is much greater in those places. The reception one gets is different in those places. Up at Lawrence Livermore, where they bring in off-duty cops dressed in full riot gear, and they have five hundred sets of metal handcuffs, and some of that's the intimidation factor. The repercussions are much greater elsewhere than they are here, at this point. But it is a good place for people to come and test themselves. Like Steve Kelly said, just practicing. It's a good place to start.

I think that's very interesting because the test site itself, in talking to different types of people that have been affiliated with it in one shape or form, which include people on the protest side as well those who actually work at the test site. It seems that the test site is almost its own little piece of culture that has its own little sets of rules and—it is almost in its own sphere, its own time frame, still.

It is. I think some of that is shared. It's not *only* the test site, but it's Los Alamos, Sandia, and Livermore. The nuclear industry does have its *own* subculture. There is still kind of a time warp of living in the Cold War era.

Because in a sense, it almost encompasses some of the more innocent values, if you will, of what that era itself encompassed; where you're not met by a line of members of the SWAT team or a line of security that's in the full garb, and rarely is there prosecution. It seems different than possibly other, even nonviolent activities that go on at other places.

Yeah, certainly, and Livermore now, it's been years since I've been there and some of this is word of mouth. At various times, I think they still have prosecuted people who've crossed the line at Livermore. Now, usually they're charged with a traffic violation, rather than a trespass violation, and it varies. Certainly in '93 when I was there, they dropped the charges that year. I don't know if they continue to do that. But yet the intimidation factor is there, in terms of having—as you go in, now, they may have eased off on that, but half-a-block in each direction of any entrance, you'd have a line of cops, and I think they were trying to protect people from going over the fence. It was the stated intent, you know. But they would be in helmets and batons and flak jackets, so it was more of an intimidation factor in that regard.

But here it's just the guys in their regular uniforms.

Right. Well, the Wackenhut, the sheriff's deputies, the past times I've been out there, the sheriffs are not even wearing pistols at that *time*. Certainly when they're on duty elsewhere.... Some of them might be, some of them might not be. Wackenhut usually are simply wearing a revolver, and they might or might not be wearing body armor, at that point, a Kevlar jacket. Usually not, though it depends, I think, sometimes it depends on the weather.

A little hot for Kevlar.

Versus times, for instance, going out for a Yucca Mountain tour, and even three miles down the [00:45:00] line at the entrance to Mercury, where they're wearing full array and might be carrying an M-16 as well as a hand gun as well as, you know—full gear type of thing. So that's

been quite the difference, that when we're out there, they've minimized the aspect. And part of that's just the history that we've built up.

Have you seen any changes, just in the attitudes, procedures, interactions, since 9/11? Have things changed?

The request that's been made to us has generally been, we would prefer that you come in straight over the line, rather than walking through the desert. Now, part of that is perhaps laziness on their part, that they don't want to go chasing across the desert. Though part of it does get in the aspect that, yes, well, when we're at Agent Orange alert, you know, I mean—it is a virus that is defoliating society, but at the heightened level, they are *much* more concerned with backcountry actions. And those will be met with—depending on levels of resistance once people are found, they take those a lot more seriously. At the front gate, it's still pretty much the same old, same old. They let us know that, and they keep repeating, backcountry actions are not to be entered into. But we've been greeted with the same levels, because I was in touch with them after 9/11 as we planned out for New Year's, which was heightened, and they said, no, if it's the straightforward stuff we're talking about, there's no problems.

Interesting. So do you have any specific experiences at the test site that stand out in your mind as more interesting or significant for you, or significant with the Nevada Desert Experience, or even toward the movement?

Well, I'll say—I did this on microphone a couple weeks ago as I went on a tour of the test site that was being led primarily by Bob Nelson. It was a group of Episcopal clergy who were in town, and about twenty or so went out there. I was up front and able to grab the mike a few times and sort of give an opposing point of view, not directly *confronting*, but challenging at certain levels, or offering different perspectives. But I admit to having a certain level of schizophrenia

when I go out there, because as an engineer—applied science, there's some fascinating stuff. And the understanding of things, you know, what does this thing do and how do we test how it does, that engages certain parts of the mind. The problem is compartmentalizing, which I think that's one of the aspects that I see with Bob, that he compartmentalizes things, and so doesn't make the connections on the spirituality with what he does for a living. And that's part of what I was trying to do, was more integration and saying, OK, what are the results of some of this? I had encountered some of that aspect in Africa, being at an engineering conference, and hearing a fascinating engineering presentation on how do you do a design manual to built complete new townships on the sides of mountains, 18 percent slopes, and so on, and I'd just think, Wow, it's fascinating stuff. How much water do you give to people? And OK, you're laying it out so that there's a driveway to every place. Then you start thinking, Oh, well, why are you doing this? Who's *living* in these places? Oh, that's the *townships* where you're shipping all the blacks out from the cities onto their own homelands now. So you're isolating—these are the poor. They don't have cars. Why do you have to have a driveway at every house? Oh, so the security forces can drive up to their house at three o'clock in the morning. In other words, make the connections.

So there's a huge disconnect between what we're talking about—Point A and Point B.

[00:50:00] And so many people say, I just do my job one hour a week on Sunday. So let's make these connections and what's going on. That's a part of the thing when I go out there. To me, it's spiritual warfare when I'm out there. Praying for the redemption of the land. And of course, the tour gives me a chance to go in farther into the site *to* some of these places to have these opportunities to pray on the land more. But also to try to help other people challenge these things in their minds. And actually one of the people who was on the tour had *been* in the

military and was part of the guinea pigs that were out there at Camp Desert Rock that bivouacked in to witness some of the open air, atmospheric tests. So he was able to recognize some of the areas around Yucca Flats.

Who was this?

Oh, boy, you'd have to ask Anne [Bucher-Symens]. I don't recall his name. I could probably find it on the list from the conference, but I'd really have to do some research on that. But he was later a military chaplain. And I had conversations with him. It's difficult to be *in* the system and challenge the system at the same time. I mean, he talked of the aspect that when you're a captain, you can't be a pastor to the colonel. The two don't mingle, type of thing. You got to have special permission to speak freely, you know, things like that. So it's very hard to be in the system and challenge it at the same time. That was part of his experience.

But to be able to go and to have interaction with the folks who were on the tour and say, *where is this?* Take it to another level. Think of the challenges. It's not just God and country. That becomes a civil religion that doesn't get thought about.

Was this just a general public tour or was this—?

No. Well, there are general tours available. In this case, Bob arranged the tour specifically for that day, and he brought along another coworker, a former coworker of his, to do parts of the tour, as well.

So it's just little challenges. I think some folks wanted me to give more direct challenge on some of the issues. It's kind of hard in the midst of that scenario to—because a lot of what Bob was doing. He's telling his—I'm going to call them war stories—he's telling his stories of the things that happened to him while he was out there and, you know, the great fun. This was his life, so he's got great stories to tell about his life. But that takes it away from, what's the

implications of all this? What about the Downwinders? What about the folks who grew up with this, and the results? Connie Peterson over in St. George who's lost at least one daughter to leukemia, and works with Downwinders there, and at the same time tries to help test site workers get the benefits that have supposedly been promised them.

What about the test site workers themselves? I definitely get the sense that, with all the folks [protesters] I've talked to, nobody's really harboring anything against the actual people that work out at the test site. It's just more of the test site itself.

It's a challenge. It's the test site itself more than the workers, though the challenge to the workers is a matter of, Wake up. Have a spiritual awakening. The country's changed. The Cold War is over. You got to recognize what it is you're doing. And there's more to it than just money. And this is the difficult thing, and some who have retired and then start getting active in antinuclear activities, it's kind of a tough situation for many people who've been in the movement for a while and say, Well, you just held out for your pension. Well, having financial security for the family doesn't need to be *the* primary thing, but that's the American way. It's a challenge. There are hardships to be faced: How come you didn't get out earlier? Well, a pension's nothing to [00:55:00] sneer at, certainly. But it is a challenge for everybody involved to figure out where am I and why am I doing this, and not to cast judgment. Some of those who've been on tour, actually a tour in '91 that Bob led, was a Lenten Desert Experience. People came in early for the tour. But we had to challenge folks on the tours, Don't demonize it. I mean, there's a lot to challenge, but don't just automatically demonize it, and sneer. We all have our foibles that, you know, somebody could throw rocks at us, too.

So most of the people involved have at least been on a tour of the test site, it sounds like. A lot of people are little bit more familiar with the test site beyond just pulling up to it and hanging out.

Right. Right. A number are. I mean, our mailings right now go to about four thousand people, and there've been *lots more* over the years that we've lost touch with, for various reasons. So I don't think it would be too hard to say ten thousand people have been affected over the years with this stuff. There are probably five hundred or so who have been on a tour, but maybe there have been more.

I'm curious about locally—how is it organizing things here locally? Is there a community response? What's the scene like here?

Well, I think it's one of the things that there used to be a very strong local base and a lot of local parishes involved. And I think over the years, a lot of that's waned, partially when George the First [George H.W. Bush] placed the moratorium in 1992. A lot of people thought everything had gone away, and so a lot of interest died out, including in town. A lot of the organizing for events has been more national efforts than keeping a local base. Though I've been around to a couple clergy meetings and talked with folks and they say, Oh, I remember them. So there's still a number of clerics in town whose churches had been involved years ago. And as time allows, and over the next year, especially, building up for the sixtieth anniversary, we want to renew some of those contacts as we're able. But a lot of this organizing takes time and effort to stay in touch with folks, locally as much as nationally, and it's a matter of priority. Where can we get the *best* effect for the smallest amount of effort on some of these things?

So have you encountered any opposition locally?

Yes, it showed up recently that this past January—well, December 31st, New Year's Eve, as part of our New Year's event. We were hosting one of about ten nationwide Jewish-Muslim peace walks sponsored by a group in Albuquerque, a rabbi and the head of the Islamic Center, but it's co-sponsored through the Fellowship of Reconciliation [FOR]. And we were putting on the

peace walk here in town. The ideal place to do it, a synagogue and a mosque that are four miles apart. It would've been great for a simple half-day event. Couldn't do it.

Where was the opposition coming from?

Well, the opposition was stemming from the fact that a good number of prominent people at one of the congregations worked at the test site, and they didn't want us involved. Now, if it had only been the Jewish-Muslim peace walk, they probably would've done it. But the fact that Nevada Desert Experience was involved, and these folks were involved at the test site, they didn't want us involved.

Now, from what I understand, anybody is welcome to participate in anything you guys do up at the test site to begin with, is that correct? It's not necessarily a Christian-based—

No, no. That's where the original roots were, but we've had involvement with Buddhists, **[01:00:00]** Muslims, Hindus, Ba'hai, Native Americans. Corbin Harney the local spiritual leader for the Shoshone, has been very involved over the years. So no, we've been an interfaith group, I think, for *most* of our history.

Right. So that opposition is interesting, and it came from people in the congregation that work at the test site?

Right. Well, you know, if it had *just* been FOR and *just* the—but the fact that we were involved—

And do you know what the issue was?

Well, yeah, we're antinuclear. Their livelihood comes from the test site. And so it's just an automatic refusal of use of the facilities.

Fascinating.

But we made do. We found other locations to do our walk. We still had a few places that—

So it still went forth.

We still had the event, but we had to modify the ways in which we did the event.

Interesting. You've got something coming up in August, and how is the organizing for that going right now?

That's doing well. At present, we have about sixty people signed up, and inevitably, we have people sign up at the last minute, so I don't know if we'll reach a hundred or not, but—

Is that average, or up or down, from this?

Well, August has usually been a low period. Not many people want to come out to the desert for August. Plus we haven't been emphasizing August as much, of late, so this is good. This is a more specifically Christian weekend. It's not exclusively. But Richard Rohr is a Franciscan and he's tying some of this Franciscan spirituality to some of our modern-day dilemma in terms of living in dark ages and where's the spirit of god, and so that's some of his talk that will attract a number of folks. And Friday night, his talk will be open to the general public in Las Vegas. So that may draw some more people to introduce us to other people who have forgotten about us or haven't heard of us as yet. With the immigration in town, lots of folks haven't even heard of us. And that'll do well. It's been a while since we've had that many. There was one August, we got creative. On the weekend, I guess, would've been the third, fourth, and fifth of August, the local Catholic Worker was celebrating their fifteenth anniversary, and *they* went out to the test site for protest on the morning of the fifth. Well, the afternoon of the fifth, if you translate Hiroshima time to local time, the bomb was dropped at quarter to five on August 5, local time. So if you make those translations—we started our August event on the afternoon of August the fifth, and we camped out in the desert until August 9, or the local time. It was about ten of us overall who were out there for that. So it's a totally different type of event. Didn't draw a lot of folks, but it

was part of a faithful witness—just another way to be present. That was an event where one person upped the ante and did manage to get arrested. When they came to cite him out again, he said, Thank you, but no, and stayed in the cage. And they went to cite him out and he said, Thank you, but no. On the third time of asking, they took him to Beatty and charged him with trespassing. So it *is* possible to actually get charged, but it takes a little more doing.

[laughter]

It's interesting that you actually have to work at getting charged.

Right. And in court, part of his challenge to the district attorney was, Why does it take so much effort to—? How come you're not prosecuting me. And the district attorney says, I just do what they give me to charge. So he's kind of leaving it on the sheriff, in that sense.

[01:05:00] *So, given where we're at currently in our state of existence, what do you foresee as the future of the test site, [and] Nevada Desert Experience? Do you think the test site is going to become—I mean, things are going on there right now that they continuously talk about reactivating it. What's your sense?*

I think a good deal has to do with this election this coming fall. Twenty-five million dollars authorized to study speeding up testing seems to have one purpose in mind, is that upon election—I won't say reelection, but upon election, George Bush would then abdicate the moratorium, abdicate the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Nonproliferation Treaty, do away with those, and move into a testing phase. That's my suspicion. By being able to test within a three-year—I mean, currently, to say, We want to design a test and let's go for it, it takes about three years to do it safely. And by trying to speed things up so that they can test within a year or eighteen months, he wants to be able to do it before he's out of office, and not

have people fuss at him for it. That's what it looks like to me. And it's easy, with all the other distractions going on, to lose sight of that as a real possibility. But the bunker busters, which is an absurdity to begin with—because the missiles can't penetrate to a depth that are *needed* to penetrate. If you're not directly on top of the target, nuclear detonation's not too likely to produce seismic waves and destroy enough of what you're after anyway. So all you've done is just contaminate the earth above, which you've got to have a certain depth of penetration before you *contain*. Though it wouldn't be fully contained because you'd have an open hole where the missile penetrated anyway. So part of what this is saying is that there are some in the government who—and the idea of having the mini-nukes, I think even some kilotonnage up to five megaton—I can't remember how much the dial of yield is, I don't remember what ranges they're talking about. But the fact that people are talking about being able to have an acceptable *yield* to irradiate a place says that there are some in the country who are going *backwards* in thought process rather than forwards in terms of nuclear weapons. The fact that they think that this is acceptable—to destroy that many civilian population and have that much contamination. So those aspects are, I think, a challenge that says we need to continue and be ready to help organize. Because I think if a couple more steps are taken, that national attention will start coming out here again, and we'd be able to help other groups if other groups started up, or to help get more events going.

So there's a potential, I don't want to say resurgence, but there's a potential for organizing?

Right. And part of that, we're trying to promote a resurgence with the sixtieth anniversary of the bomb. That's an anniversary that we need to keep. We're trying to *make* the test site a national location for highlighting the sixtieth anniversary of the bomb. Historically, it hasn't been in existence that long. Nevertheless, it's a good place to highlight that this stuff is still going on.

Right. We're coming to the end of the CD. I just want to stop right here and switch it out real quick.

[01:09:41] End Track 2, Disk 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 1, Disk 2.

[00:00:14] End Track 1, Disk 2.

We're still in early stages in planning for that, but at the moment, we're primarily trying to get in touch with the various religious peace fellowships: the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship; Pax Christi is the primary group that we've been in touch with so far; I think the Lutherans, the Jewish. Various different groups, to try to have an event in Las Vegas, primarily, and we're going to look and see what the possibilities are, again, to be creative with what's going on. We may try to organize amongst all who are here. We may have a constant vigil at the test site, and people would be out there for a couple hours at a time, and then come back into town for other events, as well as having major events out there at the test site. It's too early to know anything on that aspect. But part of it depends on what the numbers look like. So we'll have to see part of that. And then next spring, during the Christian season of Lent, have three or four different events going on. An Episcopal event is in the works. A Quaker event and a Methodist event are on the books presently.

Do you think that all of this has, over time, impacted the test site? What do you think the overall impact has been, if there has been one?

I think the impact has been more on individuals involved with programs. That *our* presence, the presence of Tri-Valley Cares [in Livermore, CA] or—there's another group at Livermore, the Livermore Conversion Project, I think—the fact that people *know* that those are around means that some of the scientists and the engineers, as they start having qualms of conscience, know

that there's somebody they can go and talk to and examine what those possibilities are. And that has happened. The Los Alamos Study Group, now based in Albuquerque, and some other things that have gone on out at those labs—that people know that they're there. It's kept the issue alive but, also there's part of me that says that this is what's leading to polarization in our country, OK? But I don't think that's a bad thing. The problem has been, is that out of sight, out of mind and a blind acceptance of these things has meant that nobody's questioning, nobody's looking at them, and they need to be—it's like the nuclear waste dump. They don't need to be in somebody else's back yard; they need to be in everybody's front yard where people have to pay attention to them and have to say, this is the repercussion of my lifestyle. This is what it's costing. Is that acceptable? And to have a national discussion on what's going on. The problem is, that where polarization has become a problem, two extremes snipe at each other rather than getting meaningful dialogue going. But I think that there's been an entrenchment on, for want of a better word, I'm going to say on the right; a more conservative entrenchment, taking us *back* in time and trying to polarize us against the world. I'm right and you're wrong, type of mentality. And that's been a real challenge. So yes, advertising leads to divergence, but it doesn't have to lead to polarization. And we're trying to keep the issues alive in a healthy sense.

Right. Interesting. You mentioned this a little bit earlier. As an engineer, I'm just curious if you have any thoughts about, or are intrigued at all, about what types of things go on, just from an engineering perspective. You were talking about compartmentalizing before, but I'm wondering if you ever think, wow, I wonder how they made that work, or, I wonder what process went into that?

Well, that question, also, I think, highlights some of the difficulties on looking at contractors and **[00:05:00]** subcontractors and various workers at the test site. By and large, the *testing* is done by people from the labs, and most of what's done out here is more the infrastructure, certainly at

this point, Hey, we've got to string another fifty miles of electric line. So there's a lot of the infrastructure type of thing in the tour that we got into Yucca Mountain and so on. Yeah, it's fascinating stuff, getting that size of boring equipment and laying track, and there's a lot of logistical stuff that it *is* interesting, but there are much better places too. Believe me, the stuff that I've seen in Africa; we could be helping a lot of African countries with infrastructure, and that would improve the global economy. But that's not of interest to the folks that have a we-want-to-spend-it-at-home-on-our-thing-to-protect-what-we've-got mentality. So yeah, those *are* still fascinating, but I can take that or leave that. It's not of prime importance. Environmental cleanup. I had looked—actually, there was an engineering firm back in Raleigh, North Carolina, after I left the monastery, that I had some preliminary interviews. If memory serves me correctly, more a matter of cleaning up depleted uranium, that was the project at hand. Finding remote controls to, you know, as it's used in artillery shells and so on, to go clean up the landscape where it's been used. And that was of interest, but I still came down to the question of ultimate disposal. All you're doing is containing and storing. So I could have had a good job out of that, but ultimately, the wrong questions were being addressed. I decided not to pursue that any further and be part of an ongoing problem.

And, to me, that seems to be a really interesting point or, again, tension. However you want to refer to it, there is this enormous amount of brainpower and very technologically advanced—it seems that we can choose how we harness that and what directions we choose to put that to work.

If we put the money into ultimate disposal, that's what would be studied. Back in the seventies, the money was being put into public works funds for sewage treatment plants, to get those upgraded. *Boom!* Lots of energy, lots of good cleanup to clean up the water. The effort and the

money was there. So it's unfortunate. I mean, economics has become the god of the United States, and so where the money goes, *droom!* That's where people follow. And yeah, I can understand that. Lots of people say, I've got families I've got to support. I'm going to chase a good job. I can understand that to a point, but I think we've made a false god out of that, so that people just got caught up in the system; then buying into the system in order to keep the money flowing. And it's a false economy, that these are the high-paying jobs over here and we could equalize the economy a lot more and have a lot less divergence in the poverty of this neighborhood, compared to the waste of money at the test site.

Right. There seems to be a lot of waste.

The waste of money, with everybody *driving* to the test site on a daily basis. Even those who *take* the buses out there.

Yeah. It's definitely a lot of finances involved in that. It just seems that the actual tests themselves, or even preparing for the tests, is extremely expensive.

You asked earlier, I think some of these dovetail to each other in terms of where the test site is going and some of that aspect. I think it's commendable that some of the alternate uses that are being *sought* for the test site, though some of those, I think, are pie in the sky. A NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] landing strip for shuttles and things like that, you know, they might be in the realm of possibility. The HAZMAT's [Hazardous Materials] location out there. Part of me looks at all the hazardous chemicals being used for live [00:10:00] demonstrations and sort of think about, But they're using it in the same place that's been polluted already, and yet definitely with all the hazardous materials we've got in this country, hands-on training is necessary for the workers. So there's a definite value to doing some of that. The difficulty with that being a controlled site and the unknowns out at Area 51, that the

idea of having the wind energy out there that was proposed—well, the Air Force put the kibosh on that because the air motion and the frequencies and so on were going to disrupt certain experiments they were doing. So, you know, the possibility for conversion isn't as good as it would seem on the surface because there *are* those unknowns. And that's something I don't think we've ever tried to take a look at. I don't know anybody at NDE who's tried to take a look at the repercussions in terms of Area 51 and all that goes on there. That's probably too far out of our league to take on. That's something that would have to be more of a policy group thing than our group.

Somewhere along those lines, do you think that the test site does or has done an adequate job of conveying information to the general public about what is going on, what things they're doing out there? The test site has this big, looming image; a lot of people have no idea what goes on, and you seem to have a little bit more of a grasp, and then the flip side of that is, are people open to hearing about it?

Boy, it's a real mixed aspect because a lot of it ties in. Essentially, what they want to say is, We're testing the bombs that are needed so that you can be safe. Don't ask any questions. Trust us, we're the government. Which is all the more reason not to trust, unfortunately, as it's been demonstrated time and again, the way the government has used folks as a guinea pig and *lied* about it. It's taken several decades to find out about the health impacts and the health studies that have gone on, that they *knew* about all this stuff and just plain lied from day one about a lot of things. And I mean, it's the Cold War mentality: I know more than you do, but I can't tell you about it. My daddy knows more than your daddy, you know, that type of thing as I was growing up, that my daddy has a higher clearance than your daddy does. They keep promoting all that, which tends to polarize but it's also a distraction. You've got people fighting among themselves over here; that means that nobody's paying

attention to what's going on over here. So I think some of that mentality still goes on, that while there's a—there's some additional transparency. There are more test site tours, but you're seeing select sites that they want you to see. And there's stuff that's going on five miles up the road, over the horizon, that they're *not* going to tell you about. It's still active stuff going on out there, some of which the folks who are leading the tour may not even know about, because if you go part way up that road, you'll be stopped and not allowed to see it. So I think there are a number of things that are going on out there that still maintain certain levels of secrecy. Certainly, certain parts of the test site have been used in other ways. Some of the tunnels that have been dug and some of the caves that are out there were used as bombing runs before Afghanistan. That was hands-on experience. It was part of the agreement with the Nellis bombing range that they were able to test some of the stuff the Marines tested out there. So some of that, that's outside of the scope for Nevada Desert Experience. Our stated purpose is the nuclear issue. I think *most* people involved with Nevada [Desert] Experience also come from a perspective that the military as it exists is unwieldy and not really necessary in the [00:15:00] forms that it takes, and so would really question a lot of those exercises. But if you've got a military, you need to train them. Well, that's part of the operations out there that have been used. I think that some of the transparency is more a PR gimmick. It's more a matter of saying, *This is what we want you to see, and here's our spin on it, and we're going to give you our spin because the other folks are better at spinning than we are right now. Having been to the top of the mountain, heard the geologists say, Well, you see, there's the volcano. It's over there. It's five miles away, knowing that folks there have no idea what volcanoes are and how they act and the fact that that is a problem, but they make it sound as if five miles makes a difference. So it's a lot of spin in that regard.*

Interesting. I'm very curious, from your perspective as putting your engineering skills to use, what do you think about the whole Yucca Mountain argument, structurally speaking?

Well, the thing that strikes me the most on that is that the initial mandate was to have *natural* burying for radiation, and every time they do another level of testing, they're having to decide on a *human* barrier, or a constructed barrier, a *designed* barrier, because the natural barrier isn't going to cut it. So that's the biggest flaw that I see here at this point. These engineered barriers are designed in such a way that they're going to do all the protection. That starts saying, it doesn't all need to come together in one place. Where transport is going to be a big bugaboo that they *say* they've got in tow, but as you look at the design parameters, a lot of them are false parameters. A lot of them are *political* designs rather than proper construction designs. The transport casks that are required to withstand a ten-mile-an-hour impact, whereas, I mean, if they're traveling by rail, that may be the case. But if they're traveling by truck at seventy miles an hour, something's wrong with this picture. Not to mention that each test of being dropped six feet onto a spike, a penetration, is not with the same cask or simultaneous to the impact. The fire barrier is unrealistic, given the fire in the Baltimore train tunnel a couple years back. That demonstrated a lot of things that the design parameters just are, you know—several of those could happen simultaneously, and to hit the side of a bridge at seventy miles an hour and to be dropping fifty feet and keep rolling down into the bottom of a reservoir that's twenty-five foot deep instead of six foot deep—all of these things that can happen that could be realistic simultaneous occurrences. So I really question the design parameters for a lot of those. My overall suspicion is that onsite storage at the nuclear power plants in these newly designed containers that are supposed to be so—just don't transport them, but to look for onsite storage is the way to go. Now, the dilemma is, it gets back to the political agreements that were made that

got the government in bed with the nuclear industry. They made promises that just couldn't be kept. Sounded good at the time, but they couldn't be kept. And that those need to be reneged on, and then local storage is needed, that's going to make more and more people aware of what's in their back yards, in terms of nuclear power. Not only is it an active plant, but this stuff's being stored here rather than taken offsite. We need to be aware of it. [00:20:00] Is this acceptable? And unfortunately, this gets into the political arena, too, is the subsidies by the government on insurance and other things, that if people were having to pay the true cost of nuclear-produced electricity, it would price nuclear out of the market. From an economic standpoint, if *all* the storage costs, long-term as well as the insurance costs and so on, were—you know, but that's the sleight of hand: Let's get you looking over here instead of over here. So the true costs would say no, we need to be looking back at steam or at some of these other situations, and all of a sudden, solar becomes more [cost-effective]—but again, where are the subsidies? If the subsidy went into solar, it would be cost-effective the same way that these others are.

Now, is this an issue that Nevada Desert Experience is tangentially involved in?

I'd say tangentially, that some of us who are more involved with, it's on the tangent, we're aware of the issues and try to help. I try to keep up with Citizen Alert periodically, and we try to help each other out on some of these programs and issues from time to time.

Because certainly it's not an issue that's directly related—I mean, it is related to the test site—
But in terms of nuclear weapons and testing, it's on the periphery. It's not our main aspect.

But certainly a huge issue for Nevada.

Yeah. Yeah. And actually, Nevada Desert Experience *was* party to three of the lawsuits that were heard in January and just decided this past week, last Friday. I think it was three of them, and I'd have to go back and look and see exactly how they were blended together. In my recollection,

the one that *won* in terms of the ten thousand year standard, I think we *were* a party to that particular lawsuit, along with the one that's an alphabet soup of all that was involved, the NIRS, Nuclear Interest Research Group, and I think the PIRS, the Public Interest Research Group, and there were several that were parts. I think Tri-Valley Cares might've been a part of one of those. Several environmental organizations that had joined together, and we had put our name on a couple of those. I think there were nine lawsuits heard that same day. They were all sort of lumped together because they were interrelated through Yucca and the appeals court decided to hear all the arguments at one time.

Do you consider the NDE as an environmental organization, as well?

Peripherally, yes.

Because it seems like that would be part of what you're—

There's been an attempt a couple of times to get an environmental coalition here in Nevada, and we've been part of that effort. Because certainly, again, test site cleanup, you know, clean up the test site, those are environmental concerns. And again, that becomes an aspect of distraction. There is the citizens group, Citizens Advisory Board, for the Nevada Test Site that helps give input to cleaning up the test site. But it's one of those things that the terms are defined at the start by the government. The budget's defined at the start. So it's not really an advisory board *per se* on saying, *This is what needs to be done*. It's a matter [of], within these confines, what do you want to do? And you've got to buy into those confines.

So there are very specific parameters set in which they can work.

Right. So do you think that we'd be better to do publicity or to do this cleanup? Is it better to clean up here *versus* that? So it's kind of a, yes, there's public input, but in very confined—

Directed public input.

Yeah. It's not as open as their definitions would suggest.

Anything that you feel is important or necessary to add about the Nevada Desert Experience?

I think that it's covered. I was going to say, I hope that we'll be able to get you in touch with a [00:25:00] number of *other* folks who can talk about the—talking about other direct actions and the impacts that they've had. You mentioned Ken Butigan's book here and the impacts that *it's* had. That's a very direct aspect of these things. And so everybody's perspective is going to be different. I haven't been involved in as *many* actions or seen perhaps the results. There are many who will maintain, and I think there *is* some validity, that the protesting out here at the test site in the eighties and early nineties was a factor in the moratorium. And it's just out of sight, out of mind, there's no testing in people's minds, even though subcritical testing goes on. And the whistleblowers at the labs say the new generation of weapons is being designed based on subcritical. So it's not stockpile stewardship as some people claim.

It's just gone and gotten a different name and—

You know, they're calling it one thing and using it for something else, so that's an unfortunate—

Well, certainly if you think there are any other important people that would be good to talk to, I would love to talk to them. And as we discussed a little bit earlier, I would like to go up to the test site with you guys in August, if that's a possibility.

OK. And I think certainly it would be good to get you over to at least some of the program on the day before. Whether you're able to interview people directly at that point might be too distracting, but at least you might be able to make some contacts and let people know what this project's about. Then some people may come flocking to you for an interview.

Certainly if somebody wanted to do an interview that day, I would be open to it. But I'd also like to just come, hang out, and see what goes on, and meet people. And definitely go out to the test site and see that because that's very interesting. Eventually for my own research, my own work.

OK. Your end touch is no less than the pure sciences, to use that antiquated term, sociology.

[00:27:40] End Track 2, Disk 2.

[End of interview]