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

Interview with Pauline Silvia
with Rosemary Lynch

October 19, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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.

Interview with Pauline Silvia and Rosemary Lynch

October 19, 2005
Conducted by Mary Palevsky

Table of Contents

Interview with Pauline Silvia and Rosemary Lynch

October 19, 2005 in Las Vegas, NV
Conducted by Mary Palevsky

[00:00:00] Begin Track 1, Disc 1.

[Recording starts mid-sentence.]

Pauline Silvia: —in which anyone is going to be allowed to validate the radiation causing leukemia or cancer, because that is not acceptable within our culture. Because we have to be able to accept the fact that radiation is a good thing, like Martha Stewart would say, it's a good thing, but they cannot afford to let this evidence come forward. They have to look at it and try to detract from it as much as they possibly can. And I don't think any of us in this generation are ever going to see the day. Like the people in St. George [Utah]. You know I know about that from a personal experience, and those people are still arguing and the government is still saying ain't so, nothing happened. You know.

Mary Palevsky: *That is another issue, that political issue, absolutely, and even within the cases where we've got the compensation program; I go to these breakfasts of a lot of these miners that worked out at the [Nevada] test site and a lot of them are asking for compensation through the government program that was finally put through, and they had a very difficult time proving their cases, even though now there seems to be certain evidence. But you said you know about the St. George stuff from personal experience.*

Pauline Silvia: The St. George incident was one of the [Operation] Upshot [Knothole]—

M.T. Silvia: Well, I think there were several St. George incidences, not just from one—

Rosemary Lynch: I went to St. George and all over that area of Utah with another Franciscan sister [Beatrice Hernandez] who is an oncologist, medical doctor, and we interviewed many of the people who had been under the cloud of the radioactive dust. The stories that we heard could

break your heart. I talked to one young man. He had a brace on his shoulders, one of those things that had to hold his head up, because he was so damaged. Talked to another man who said that whenever they heard a test was coming—they didn't understand the danger—they would go outside and it was exciting. They could see this beautiful pink cloud drifting over. And his wife, he said, was a very beautiful young woman, had heavy black hair, never had been sick, and they were out there one time—they said they used to shake the radioactive dust out of their hair, you know, not realizing what—and they were watching and they saw this cloud pass overhead. Three days later, his wife got sick. She went into the bathroom and he heard a terrible scream. She was washing her hair in the basin in the washroom, in the bathroom, and her whole head of hair came out and was lying in the washbowl. And she was screaming. And not long after, she died of internal cancers. But her whole head of hair.

And I talked to all those victims. I talked to somebody who had lost nine members of their family in the above-ground tests, and they described—I talked to one woman who had lived on a farm and she described the radioactive dust coming down. She had a little boy, I don't know, four or five years old, and he got violently ill and died, passed away. And she got a letter from a government official saying it was too bad her son died, but we must all be ready to make some small sacrifice for our country. She said, `Small sacrifice? My child died.` And she described going in and shaking the radioactive dust out of her hair.

So you know there is some connection. We can't deny—

Oh, I don't want you to think that I'm not saying that there's a connection. I'm saying the tragedy of it is that because of secrecy, because of national defense—[Andrei] Sakharov's point was because we've decided not to talk to each other about this, in defense of the Cold War, we're doing things that are damaging, and it will be very hard to sort it all out, and he predicted a lot

of what you both are talking about, in that it's so difficult. So understand my point. He's saying many people will die, but because the United States and the Soviet Union are in this arms race and they're not talking about it what the testing is producing, it's going to make it so much more painful for future generations to deal with this damage that is hidden, not understood, not properly monitored, all these things.

Klaryta Antoszewska : But you know the one thing, they came from Kazakhstan here to Las Vegas to one of the big protests. Scientists came, a lot of medical doctor women, mostly **[00:05:00]** women because in Russia the women are doing a lot of research; they came here to see what's happened around test site, and they told what was happening around in Kazakhstan in their area. And they wanted even to go to the hospitals and see what government is doing with all those people that had been exposed, and they had been very much surprised. I translate for one woman, and so she says, `I'm surprised that government is totally like not involved in the whole issue of radiation.`

[00:05:56] End Track 1, Disc 1.

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

Pauline Silvia: I just never paid attention to it and I feel ashamed that I didn't, you know, at this point.

Rosemary Lynch: But you know I think that's a phenomenon which comes out of our kind of American mindset. I grew up thinking that this country could do no wrong. We had done so much, and that mindset was so prevalent. It's was like God's country, we were specially blessed; in the end when we defeated the terrible Communists, we had this sort of sense of virtue, which is still a little bit prevalent in the country, and we tended to overlook the failings and flaws in our own government because we felt very self-righteous, we were God's country, God bless America, and all that stuff. Well, I love the country, too, but I always say I love the country the

way you love your mother when she's sick. You don't say, Oh, Mother, your hair looks nice and your fingernails are nice. You say, Mother, something's wrong with your heart, or your lungs, or whatever it is. I want to help you get better. And that's how I love the country. There is something that needs to be corrected. We need to have more of a sense of universalism. Whether we like it or not, we are entering the age of internationalism. We cannot exist without other countries. We cannot. And they cannot exist maybe without us. But unfortunately, we misuse this power that we have.

Pauline Silvia: Exactly. Misuse.

Rosemary Lynch: We badly misuse it. And when I think of how we have squandered our national treasure, not only in money but in human life, in research, and so on, for destructive purposes, it breaks my heart. If we had dedicated a fraction of this learning, this background, this science, this human life, this human endeavor to promoting the benefit, the welfare of the human family, we would be far ahead of where we are right now.

So that's how I love my country. I feel that I want it to be better. I want it to be noble. I don't want it to run around tramping on other people.

Pauline Silvia: No, I agree with you. In psychiatry we'd talk about content and process, and our country's content is we're going to help, we're going to be the savior; but the process indicates that we're doing anything but helping and saving. We're destroying. We're taking over and taking rights away from people within our own country as well as in other countries, but the content is that we're doing good things, we're doing good stuff, but he reality is, no, you're not.

Rosemary Lynch: All the millionaires are happy.

Pauline Silvia: Precisely. Yes.

Rosemary Lynch: So, we have to understand that we do need some radical changes. We need to have certainly a more socially-oriented mentality, that I cannot really be happy if my foot is stepping on you, that we both can be happy together, and that we don't need a bank account that runs into ten figures or whatever when somebody else is begging for a piece of bread. We have to understand those things.

M.T. Silvia: Yes, I think in my mom's experience when she was at the test site, she was twenty-three years old, she was a very young woman, and you know it was such a patriotic thing at that time to witness a detonation.

Rosemary Lynch: What years were those that you—?

Pauline Silvia: I was there in the spring of 1953 for what they call [Operation] Upshot-Knothole. I wasn't there for every one of those shots but for I believe five I was there?

M.T. Silvia: Yes.

Rosemary Lynch: And that was another thing, the romantic names they gave to all the tests. That was also deceptive. You'd think you were getting a bouquet of roses instead of a lethal dose of radiation.

Pauline Silvia: True.

M.T. Silvia: But in my mom's thinking over the years, we've been talking about this for many years and going from that point of feeling really patriotic to where you didn't think about it and now suddenly on your spiritual journey this is all coming up for you again and you're thinking about it. I don't know if you want to tell Sister Rosemary about that, but it's been an interesting journey for you.

Pauline Silvia: Well, it sort of awakened it—the experience, and coming across **[00:05:00]** old artifacts from when I was doing the work and seeing those. I can't [talk about this]—

M.T. Silvia: It's OK, Ma. It's all right.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, it wasn't any individual. It was a mindset in the nation: Why should I go anywhere when I'm already there? We've got it made. All that stuff. People were psyched out and there was a romanticism attached to all of it, along with the patriotism. And I have to say, when I went to Europe the first time, I was shocked to discover that people didn't think about us the way I thought about the country. And I lived in Europe for, well, altogether it was my address for sixteen years, although I moved around and my headquarters were in Rome [Italy]. I had this wonderful job with an international organization and with the Franciscan sisters. I traveled to many countries, and it was shocking to me that not everybody had this positive attitude toward the country that I had thought they did. And I have to say that after my first trip to Africa and I saw the sorrow and the misery and the pathetic situation—I went to a leper colony. I thought modern medicine had conquered leprosy. And then I came to this one poor, poor village and there were a couple of sacks of some kind of rice or corn, gift of the people of the United States of America. I mean isn't that shabby, a little sack of rice, whatever, when these people are suffering this way? And I saw those women. I can hardly talk about some of those experiences without tears even to this day.

I went back to Rome and I went through what I now call my anti-American period. I just could not believe the injustices that I had seen and the tragedies that I had seen. I couldn't go in any store. If I went in something that would be equivalent like a K-Mart or something and I'd see these rows of false eyelashes or something, I wanted to scream, we're buying false eyelashes and

I've just seen children die of hunger. I don't have anything against cosmetics. We have to try and rescue what good looks we have. I'm not saying that. But it was the contrast, you know, and the African women are beautiful, but half of them were starving. And the children, that's what broke my heart. So for about six months I couldn't even think of the country with any affection and then I thought, well, that's not helping anything either. I have to get over it. So I got into several international organizations and I really tried to work as hard as I could for better economics and look for international agreements, as much as I could on the international scene.

So you know all of that is still strongly inside of me, those things. I saw again in Indonesia a transmigration camp. The island of Java was getting so overpopulated and they were relocating—

[00:08:29] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 1.

Rosemary Lynch: —and for what? For what? Those kids that come back minus their arms and legs. It is such a heartbreak. And they have to be asking, for what? They have to continue saying, `Well, I was fighting for freedom`, or something. Otherwise they couldn't live. So our work is not done in this world. Even if we're older, I'm very old and I think as long as God gives me the strength, I'm going to do whatever I can.

It was very interesting. Last Sunday I went with Peter Ediger from the Pace e Bene group, and the two of us were invited out to Saint Viator Church, a very nice upper-middle-class-area church, to give a talk. And Peter is a Mennonite and of course I'm a Franciscan sister. We've worked together for years. But it was so interesting. It was the young people that came up afterwards and said, `Will you come back? Will you talk to us again?` And I had been tirading on nonviolence and how we—it's a method that's never been tried except by people like

Gandhi, Martin Luther King, who gave up their lives for us. But you know we have never tried. I wonder what it would be like if we went to Iraq with loaves of bread or whatever it is they eat, and went to their villages and went with medical doctors and teams, if that wouldn't have been better than going with the bombs. We can't even count how many we killed.

Pauline Silvia: Who would ever think of that?

Rosemary Lynch: I was so excited. At the end the young people came up and said, `Will you come back to us?` I said, `Well, you have to invite me.` They were so open, hearing that there are alternative ways. Beautiful young people. The only thing is, I closed my eyes, do I have to see them in some stupid uniform trying to learn the business end of a rifle or whatever?

Pauline Silvia: So many of the soldiers that you see that are there in Iraq, their story is: Well, I was going to get my education, I would be able to get my degree or go to college or get a better life for my family—and that's the selling point, the come-on for them, and how disappointed they are with the reality and the consequences to them. They don't point the consequences out in terms of recruiting, et cetera.

M.T. Silvia: I was thinking about the soldiers in the trenches out at the test site. My mother did all this research about the harmfulness of radiation on tissue, on human tissue, and then they continued to put the soldiers out for many years in the trenches.

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, yes. They had no protective clothing.

Pauline Silvia: We didn't either. No, no, we didn't either. But yes, that always fascinated me—and what did they do with all of the data that we had collected, and sharing that information, and how they could just continue to put the foot soldiers in there. I was going through a book that M.T. has of pictures of different shots in Nevada and that, and there's a

group of six young men who were seated with their back to the shot, you have the mushroom cloud in the back and they're down like this and they put their heads down and their hands up like this [gesturing]. I looked at the picture closely and on the sleeve of every one of them, they were all enlisted men, usually of minimal or no rank at all, private first class, you know. That really hit me. It struck me. And then going through the [Atomic Testing] museum yesterday and seeing this huge picture on the wall of obviously officer-type persons, you could tell by their uniform, and they're sitting and they have these goggles on, and the foot soldier didn't get the goggles; but how can they do that?

Rosemary Lynch: What did you think of that museum?

Pauline Silvia: Well, I sort of shared it with my daughter this morning. An observation **[00:05:00]** about it is that it's all about the weaponry and the detonations and all of that, but there's nothing human in there. Nothing human about it at all.

Rosemary Lynch: Nothing. In fact, after we went through, there was this green boy, probably nineteen years old or around there [saying], `Wow, isn't it great!`

And I said, `You know, I think it's incomplete.`

And he said, `What?` He was just all full of pep for how great this little museum is.

I said, `You know, there was a lot to say about health effects. There was a lot to say about resistance. There was a lot to say about attitudes towards people in the town where the clouds drifted.`

He said, `Well, it was us or the Russians, so I'm glad it was us.`

I mean he didn't have any green idea of any background or anything that was going on. And he was like taking people through. But I thought that was a serious omission, that we had resistance out there, finally. I was arrested a number of times, and I remember one trial that I went to, Judge Bill [William] Sullivan who just died recently, came out afterwards—he

condemned me to a few days in jail or something, I forget, it wasn't a bad sentence. We never got those long sentences like some people got, like months and months; we got some days or whatever. He came out and is still in his judge's robe and he put his arms around me and said, If I could follow my heart, I would call you innocent, but I have to follow the law. You did trespass, so I had to find you guilty. He had tears. You know that moved me so much, that this good man, the judge, also understood the inside truth of what was going on.

Pauline Silvia: The truth. Yes.

Rosemary Lynch: Absolutely. And I made friends with General [Mahlon] Gates who was the head of the test site at that time. A big guy, ex-military. The whole test site, as you know, had to be run by civilians, but they were all ex-military.

Pauline Silvia: Yes.

Rosemary Lynch: So he went by General Gates. And our group, this was in the early days, they had delegated me to go and visit him and tell him what we had planned, and I really wanted to do that, too. I said, I don't want to just show up out there like enemies of the state or something. I want them to understand why we're going out. And I was met by two guards with guns. They escorted me to General Gates.

M.T. Silvia: Boy, you were threatening, huh?

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, I was a big threat, yes. And he was very nervous. And they had told me that maybe he'd give me two or three minutes of his time. We sat down. I was with him at least a full hour, if not longer. He was a good man and he told me his whole life story. He was just a kid of eighteen or nineteen when he went into the military and then one thing led to another and all this stuff, he became a general, and now he's the head of the test site. And I said, Would you join us one morning? We just used to stand along the road where all the buses

and the trucks went in, and we'd pray, we'd hold up our sign. I said, Would you just join us one morning for the prayer out there? And he put up his hand and he said, I swear I can't do it. But he took hold of my hand and he said, We can pray together right here.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, praise God. Praise God.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. And we had a lovely few minutes of praying together. This is the guy that was running the test site. And as a result of that visit, he wrote a letter. At that time they had 11,000 people working between the offices here and out on the test site. He wrote a letter to all of them and explained that we were going to be out there. I never called it a protest. I always referred to it as the vigil. We were going to be out there for the vigil. It was going to be every day during the season of Lent that we went out. We were already out there before the workers all started driving in at six o'clock. We had to leave at five to get out ahead of them. And so he wrote that we were good people, that we were not to be harassed, we were not to be troubled. And he put fresh water out for us every day, and he put out the Porta-Potties, which was a big thing because there were no other possibilities, you know. And he even got razzed a little bit by the people in his office, [some asked], Whose side are you on, General Gates? But he was very good. And we erected a cross once, that was on Good Friday, and I called him and said, You know, I hope nothing will happen to the cross that we put up out there. **[00:10:00]** He said, No, I promise. I'll give orders that the cross will not be touched. And it stood out there for a long time. And when I went out once and it was gone, I called him and he said, We're not responsible for the disappearance of the cross. Somebody else took that down. He said he tried to protect it by writing. So those are all untold stories of those early days of the resistance.

M.T. Silvia: They really didn't talk about that in the museum very much at all.

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, they don't talk about any resistance.

M.T. Silvia: They barely gave a polite nod to it in the museum.

Rosemary Lynch: They didn't show one single picture of our resistance. They showed a fleeting glimpse of some group in New York, if you remember in the video, and we had, like I say, one time we exceeded the capacity of all the jails. They had to put the protesters up in—vigilers up in the hotels and that got too expensive.

Pauline Silvia: You know, you remind me, when you're talking about General Gates and about the judge, Saint Benedict has a saying that you speak the truth with heart and tongue. And these two gentlemen did exactly that.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. So they were good people but they had the military career and one thing led to another and they just found themselves in that position. Another big official out there left the test site and got ordained an Episcopal minister [Robert Nelson]. He had a real conversion.

And they even put up signs out there, it was the only place in the country, official highway signs that said, "Slow down. Protesters on the road." Somewhere I have a picture [of myself] beside that sign. And one official from the test site went back to Washington, D.C., was called back and asked about what's going on out there, all those people gathering and everything. And we could go right up—now there are fences and barricades and everything, but we could go right up, cross the cattle guard, up to where the workers went in. So they ordered them to move us back to a place where there's a kind of a dangerous curve going into the test site, and he said, `No, I don't want them to stand there.`

And Washington, D.C., they said, `Why not?`

And he said, `Well, it's very dangerous.`

They said, `So?`

And he said, Not our protesters.

And I never forgot that sentence. We had become their protesters. We were theirs.

Pauline Silvia: Ownership.

Rosemary Lynch: And they were protecting us. So I had many beautiful experiences like that, you know, he said, No, not our protesters. Because we made friends with all of them.

Pauline Silvia: Which is what your mission was to begin with.

Rosemary Lynch: That's what it was to begin with. And one time one of the buses stopped. We were standing on the line with our signs, which were always like very nice. My first sign said, what was it that I took out? It was some positive message anyway. And the bus with the workers stopped and this guy got out with this big box of doughnuts, because he felt bad we were out there fasting every day. So we had many beautiful episodes that happened. So those are all nice memories for me of my years of vigiling out at the test site.

Pauline Silvia: What were you going to say, M.T?

M.T. Silvia: I was thinking more about getting back to going through the museum. The first time I went through the museum, which was last April, I asked Jeff Gordon, he's the librarian there [Dina Titus reading room]. I don't know if you know Jeff but he said, Yes, we tried to be objective. And so when I first went through it, I thought, Boy this is so not objective.

Rosemary Lynch: They knew what their objective was.

M.T. Silvia: Yes, but you know that Ground Zero Theater? Working in the film industry, when I walked in, I was so, you know, watching that whole thing, and when they clang the seats and shoot the air at you and it's all this surround sound, it was sort of like a Disneyland

ride, and I thought, why are they doing this? Who wants this experience? And at first I burst out laughing because it was so overproduced, I just thought, this is really offensive. I was offended by it and I thought, thinking about bringing my mother to this, I wouldn't want her to sit through that. I mean yesterday when we went to the museum, I said, `Do you really want to go see that?`

And she's like, `No.`

And so I go, `OK, let's move on.`

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, I know, but beside the sound effects, they rattled you in your seat so you felt the bomb going off, and I thought it was amateurish to do that.

M.T. Silvia: But the whole exhibit for the Native American basketry and all that, it was just such a—that was offensive to me, as well.

[00:15:00] Rosemary Lynch: Yes, it was to me, too. When we think, first of all, they took their land and they deposited some money and said, `Well, now the land belongs to us.` And I remember the first time that the native Shoshone came. I was out there with my sign. I was out there about five years with my sign before anybody else came. And he said, `We've been watching you and we know that you're good people.`

You know, they had been watching. And I hadn't seen them, so I don't know from where they were watching.

And we said, `Well, we know this land belongs to you. It was taken away unjustly.`

And they said, `Yes, the land is ours, and so we're going to give you a passport.`

And they gave me a passport, and later they issued it to some other people, but I got no expiration date. I got a lifetime passport to enter the land of the Western Shoshone. And I know

when I was arrested, I would always say, Well, I'm here legally, with the permission of the owners of this land, the Western Shoshone Nation. This is their land and they have given me my passport. Well, it never was valid, but at least it made a point.

And the arresting officers were always so nice and kind. We never had any bad experience with them. The sheriff out there even sent me a Christmas card after he had arrested me a few times. One time he even stood with us in the line and he said, We haven't got very many people out here this morning. We. He associated himself with us. Yes, Jim [James] Merlino. Wonderful man.

And so we made friends, that was our objective, with the guards, with the police. One police guy was putting the handcuffs on me and he had tears, and he said, This is the most beautiful day of my police service.

I said, What? When you're putting handcuffs on me?

He said, Well, yeah, because it was all so beautiful.

We prayed and you know how we walked so peacefully over, went into the area where we weren't supposed to go, all that kind of stuff. So you know I have beautiful memories of those people.

And we always insisted, when the crowds started getting large—I remember the first day when I saw somebody out there that I didn't know, it was they were always just my old friends that went out—but when the crowds got larger, we always said, If you're planning to cross the line, we want you to take the nonviolence training. And so a Franciscan priest, Louis Vitale, and myself, we gave them the nonviolence training. And so we never had any bad episodes, and they always appreciated that. But of course they kept moving back, back, back through the area where we could freely go in, and put fences up, which we crawled through, and things like that.

M.T. Silvia: You remember, Mom, when we went to the test site on the tour, they stop and show you, remember?

Pauline Silvia: Oh! Yes. I thought it was ridiculous.

Rosemary Lynch: What was that?

Pauline Silvia: It was a part of the tour that this gentleman was taking us on on the bus, and he stopped and showed where the protesters were kept, and the fence that they kept them behind—

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, yes, our cage. That came later. First there wasn't anything. Then they put up this cage. And then they put up this watchtower thing and there was always a soldier up there. Half the time, he fell asleep. There was nothing to do.

Pauline Silvia: But this was a big thing for this fellow.

Rosemary Lynch: Big thing. They knew what we did. The guys—they had men on one side and women on the other because they're very moral, of course—so the guys dug and dug until they made a nice little trench underneath the fence and came over and then we started singing and everything. Well, the next time we went out, they had cemented that whole thing. The fence was down to here and then there was big blocks of cement poured all along. It was so funny. We really enjoyed all that. So that's all the unwritten history that was present there.

Pauline Silvia: On that tour that we went on, the biggest point of his tour was how big the hole was that they made, this hole, and everybody was expected to get off the bus and go over and look at the hole.

Rosemary Lynch: Big crater. Yes.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, you know, and that just passed right by me. I said [to myself], There's no way I'm going to get out and pay homage to what they've done.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, you know, it was so funny, I got the best—there was this public relations guy out there named Dave [David] Miller. I made friends with him, too, sort of. **[00:20:00]** And it bothered him, though, it bothered him because he wanted to be nice to me but he had this job, he was head of everything in the public relations [area]. So one time they invited me to go on what they called the VIPs of Nevada tour they had. The day before, you went to some fancy hotel and they gave this big, elaborate presentation. They invited people like the governor, the mayor, the congresspersons. I got invited, too, to go on the VIPs of Nevada. And Dave Miller, this public relations guy, they showed us everything. We went into really very interesting places which later somehow were off-limits, but I saw all those craters, too. And they took us near one area, I don't know if they still do, that has to be under surveillance in perpetuity. It is so contaminated, no human being can ever go near again. But then we sat down and they gave us a lunch and a cup of coffee, and Dave Miller, this public relations guy, is saying, `Now, if Sister Rosemary would just understand this`, and, `well, I know Sister Rosemary doesn't agree with me.` Well, before the tour, nobody knew who I was. At the end of the tour, everybody's coming over to ask me all kinds [of questions]. He was public relations for the test site, but it was the best public relations for our resistance group. And the ironic part of it was that not long after that, he died of cancer, which was very sad to me because—but it was so funny because he kept saying, you know, I was sitting there peacefully and he'd say, `Well, I know Sister Rosemary doesn't agree with this`, or, `Sister Rosemary will probably say this.` So everybody comes to me afterwards and I'm able to expound on my theories about it all, which I never would've been able to do had he not been so pointed all the time.

M.T. Silvia: What were your impressions when you first went out to the test site? What were you thinking?

Rosemary Lynch: Well, first of all, I was horrified. I was just horrified. I saw these enormous craters and I saw that town that they built out there. Did they still show you that?

M.T. Silvia: Yes, actually my mom was present at that shot where they had the houses out there.

Rosemary Lynch: And they showed you all that, and then they took us to several places where we could get out of the tour and walk around a little bit, and several places where we couldn't because it was too contaminated and you were not to touch or handle any plants or anything because they could be dangerous to you. And then they also showed us a movie of some of the early days. And we had a very, very nice lunch because these were all these VIPs that were on the tour. And I mean it was just a big heartbreak to me. Every place that we got out, I was only praying for God's forgiveness for what we're doing to our Mother Earth and for the unawareness that—

And I was sure that so many were good people. Dave Miller himself was a good man. I started calling him privately David "Put Your Foot in the Mouth" Miller because every time he opened mouth, he put his foot in it. He was on the stage with one of the professors, Craig Walton from UNLV, and Craig Walton was talking about the danger to the future generations and the seepage into the water and so on, and finally he [David Miller] said, `Well, I don't know why you're complaining about this. That radiation won't reach the water for another fifty years.` Well, doesn't that make you feel good?

Pauline Silvia: Oh, that makes me feel real good. Fifty years.

Rosemary Lynch: Half the people stood up and said, `You're telling us that in fifty years the radiation is going to reach the water.` [And he said], `Well—well—well.`

Well, now what we have is in a couple of the small towns in Nevada, they've had epidemics of childhood leukemia, and they're tracing it to the water, the ground water and the stuff that has infiltrated from the test site. And they've tried very hard to hush it up.

Pauline Silvia: Well, that's like when, looking at the exhibit yesterday reminded me again, you mentioned the village that had been built, typical clapboard village houses, and one was still standing. And on the tour, this gentleman didn't talk about the human aspect of it, about the mannequins, if you will, and their exposure to radiation. Then my comment was, looking at the picture yesterday, was that it doesn't show the thermal injury to the mannequins. And then thinking about it again last night, I was saying, they don't really connect the dots, do they? When **[00:25:00]** we went back to San Francisco, we finished our so-called neutron studies and then the next thing I knew, we were into the thermal injury branch, so that obviously something happened at Upshot-Knothole that said, `Oh, I think we'd better start looking at thermal injuries.` And none of that comes out.

Rosemary Lynch: No. There's nothing there. The museum is a glorified attempt to make us love the testing.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yes, exactly. But whether I'm missing it, and admittedly I haven't had the interest in all of this, but maybe if I researched the literature. I hadn't heard anybody talk about thermal injuries. What did they do with the information that we collected, with the data that we collected about thermal injuries? There's very little that's out about Upshot-Knothole in printed material as far as I know and just, you know, visiting and talking with people. But when I think of that man talking about that house and then I'm thinking, radiation illness and thermal injuries. And another reason why the exhibit is—there's nothing human about that museum.

Rosemary Lynch: There's nothing human about it, and it's very incomplete, I have to say.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yes.

M.T. Silvia: Mom, why don't you talk about, if you feel comfortable, talk about when Colonel [Robert] Veenstra came back when you were at the test site after going to St. George.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, St. George. Yes. Colonel Veenstra was a veterinarian and he took care of our animals that we used, and he disappeared one day and he was gone for about three days. He came back and was very quiet, and there were some specimens that he brought back, and they were extremely radioactive so that they had to be encased and then we shipped them back to San Francisco. But he didn't have anything much to say about where he was or what he had done, but several weeks down the road, he started to talk about his St. George experience. He said that he stood on a hill and in every direction that he looked were the carcasses of dead sheep, horses, cows, for miles and miles of them. And he was there within a day or two after the shot had taken place. And they tried to silence him. And in one of those articles that you had sent me, in reviewing it again before I came out here, Colonel Veenstra had reported his results. In essence, he was saying that there was evidence of radiation illness within these specimens, but then further down the line, this article talks about they were trying to get him to change his report. And Colonel Veenstra was one of the noblest, one of the greatest people; he had a heart and was honest. And the article went on to say that Colonel Veenstra in essence would not participate. He withdrew from it completely because he would not change his results. He wouldn't do it for them. But again, he was testimony to the St. George incident.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, I remember I was still teaching high school. I was principal and teacher at a small coeducational high school up in northern Montana while some of those above-ground tests were taking place, before I went to Europe. And I remember hearing about that. It was like a surrealistic experience to know that whole flocks of sheep and cattle lay dead in the

Nevada desert. And there was never any explanation given. And it was only later when I came back from Europe and began living here that I began to understand what had happened to those flocks of sheep. I mean thousands of acres were covered with dead sheep. I remember reading about that and thinking, God, what could have happened?

M.T. Silvia: I remember you talking about when Colonel Veenstra came back. At one point, you talked about how you could feel this change in him and you didn't understand what was going on. Do you remember that?

Pauline Silvia: He was not an extrovert to begin with, but probably he may have been depressed. I don't know, but there was a change in his behavior and he was much **[00:30:00]** more quiet and withdrawn, and obviously was processing all of this intellectually as well as emotionally.

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, I think so.

Pauline Silvia: And looking back on it now, that's what was happening with this man. And it's interesting. I lost track of him. When we got back to San Francisco, when we started with the thermal injury studies, when I think about it now, he wasn't there. He may've been there and I wasn't seeing him, because we were really compartmentalized in that building. And I never—I don't remember him being there.

M.T. Silvia: He wasn't one of the guys who went to Brookhaven [National Laboratory] or—?

Pauline Silvia: No, he was a career Army officer.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, I think a lot of people were psychologically destroyed, because I talked to some of them that broke down and cried. When I was doing the interviews with the radiation victims before, we compiled a lot of information, and the whole thing was to help them

get some compensation and represent themselves back in Washington, D.C. We formed this group, the *Nevada Test Site Radiation Victims Association*; a young Jewish friend of mine and myself. We went all over, and as many radiation victims or survivors that we could find, in any of the categories, workers, military, whoever, we interviewed. And again, mysteriously a lot of that paper got lost. And we formed this organization with one objective only: to kind of empower them to go back and represent their case in Washington, D.C. And we were able to get some money together and several went back as a delegation and probably, trying to get the compensation that you're talking about, too. And they did get some kind—there was some kind of a bill passed, but it was of course very inadequate; it didn't begin to deal with the real problem of radiation sickness and the death of animals, the death of plants, the contamination of the earth, it didn't deal with any of that.

Pauline Silvia: I think the bottom line was the dollar, to begin with. I mean if they admitted that there was such a thing as radiation illness, that the cost of maintaining it, when you go back and forth on it, they always say, follow the money, well, you can reduce it to its simplest terms, is how much is it going to cost us? How much are we going to have to put out in taking care of these people? And somehow or other, I think that the greatest thing that could've happened for them, even if they do not get compensation, if they get someone to come along and validate and say, `Yes, it did happen, it's true, what you've experienced is true.` That's an important thing; then to talk about the remuneration or compensation later, but just to have somebody to come out and say, `Yes, you're right, that did happen.`

Rosemary Lynch: To acknowledge that it happened. That was the first thing, was to get them recognized as victims of radiation. That was the first goal.

Pauline Silvia: See, that's the whole nomenclature that throws them off. As soon as you use the word "victim," a red flag goes up immediately, and to think about them as being people who had this experience and as a result of that experience, this is what has happened to them. And when you victimize people, I think you'd lose a little bit. I don't like to use the word "victim" myself. They were people. But if they could just come along and say, `It did happen and we are responsible.`

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. You're exactly right on that. We used that term because at that time I felt they had been victimized by the government, and we didn't have any other way to name this group. *Nevada Test Site Radiation Victims Association* is a long and cumbersome name, but it kind of described this whole group of guys that were surviving, and some we had their wives, they had already passed away. But you know I think we've gotten in this country a little bit the psychosis of blaming victims.

Pauline Silvia: Precisely.

Rosemary Lynch: But we tried to separate that out and say, you did it. You victimized these people. And like I say, our one success was we got this little delegation of really sick people who are survivors who went back to Washington, D.C. to represent themselves, and they got this **[00:35:00]** meager compensation that was passed by Congress, it wasn't much, or to their survivors, to their widows or whatever. And we formed connections with a group of the widows or survivors up in St. George, Utah and those that were under the cloud when it went up there. And it was kind of a strong organization for a while. And we had all kinds of really beautiful activities. One year we got all the people together that we could and bought a small cactus, just as a gesture to restore life to the Mother Earth, we had this day where we planted cactus all over out there near the area of the test site. And then, this was also done by an unknown artist up in one of the hills near the test site, he made this sculpture and called it "The Shadow Children."

And it was a beautiful little sculpture of a white child and a dark child, you couldn't tell much what kind of race, only one was lighter than the other, just to kind of show the universality of the people who were hurt, and they're playing and talking together. And I was one of the few that knew the way to go up into the mountain and find The Shadow Children. And up there, too, a group of widows from St. George came and we planted also this little garden around The Shadow Children. But with time and rain and storm, they were destroyed. But those were beautiful moments. They connected the people. And so that's why we really didn't call ourselves the protesters either. We always said the vigilers.

Pauline Silvia: Vigilers. Yes. I like that word.

Rosemary Lynch: We are performing a vigil to commemorate so that we can't forget those who were so badly hurt. And I never forgot that trip up to Utah with the Franciscan sister who was an oncologist and all those interviews we had. I could hardly sleep for a month after I came back from seeing those people. I talked to one woman who had lost nine or ten members in her family from cancers. Her children died. And the heartbreak. And for the widows of many of those workers or military guys, trying to make sense of it, you know.

Pauline Silvia: One of my classmates in high school contacted me in the 1980s; her husband was a chief petty officer who was on one of the ships out at Bikini Atoll, and he had become ill. They retired him and she was fighting desperately for health coverage for him because evidently his illness just did not fit into any category of health services that was going to be available. And she called me on the phone and she said to me, `Somebody told me that you did atomic research`. And we talked about it and she told me the plight of her husband and how difficult it was, and she stayed at home and she took care of him, and we talked about that. Then I met her again a few years later and her husband had passed on. She said he had a terrible

death that she had to give up everything to stay home and to look after him so that he could have a peaceful death. But it was such a struggle for her. And then we met at the fiftieth class reunion for high school and she started to tell me again about it.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. Well, I know this one case, Klaryta referred briefly to it, he was a truck driver out on the test site and he came down with terrible cancer. We didn't know him. He was also present when the Baneberry test took place and he was covered with radiation, with the particles; they rinsed him off with a hose and put him in a paper suit and sent him home. But his widow, we knew her very well. And another guy who had to go into one of tunnels and his lunchbox was radioactive. They said, `Move in`, you know.

Pauline Silvia: They don't stop for anything.

Rosemary Lynch: So we went to the trial with these widows, and Klaryta accompanied them **[00:40:00]** also to Denver [Colorado] where there was a big trial going on. And the stories that they told about the real heartlessness of the treatment that they received and that their husbands received, being told: `forget it`.

Pauline Silvia: Yes, don't be namby-pamby.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. And one of them, he was this truck driver, they had to bury his truck in the desert, it was so radioactive. But they still claimed that he must've had something else happen to him. So all these things, you know. And then we had to send some of them to doctors in New Mexico and Texas and everything because the doctors here were kind of scared of the whole thing.

Pauline Silvia: Sure.

M.T. Silvia: Maybe this is a good time to take a break.

Pauline Silvia: Yes!

M.T. Silvia: And then we have lunch, too. Time for lunch. A little time out?

[Break for lunch]

[00:41:02] End Track 3, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 4, Disc 1.

Rosemary Lynch: —like the link with those years that were like a very profound experience in my life, even though what we're able to relate is like touching the surface.

Pauline Silvia: Exactly. Just touching the surface.

Rosemary Lynch: But I have the memories of all those good people on both sides, and like I say, I looked at these guys that were working out there. A lot of them were black guys. It was the first decent job they ever had in their life when they got a job working out on that test site. Half of them got sick, too, you know. So there are still hundreds of untold stories.

M.T. Silvia: And it's good to tell them. They need to be told.

Cameraman: It's so important to tell them, and a lot of it is because, as you mentioned, you know, particularly you see young—

[00:00:56] End Track 4, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 5, Disc 1.

Rosemary Lynch: —being over there. And we made wonderful friends, loving friends with our neighbors. And I started getting letters at this little office and the postmark was just a little bit blurred, but it was Las Vegas, I could tell. And there were clippings in this, no written letter but clippings of terrible murder cases. And then one time I got this—and at first I laughed at them, you know, I thought anonymous letters I don't pay attention to. Throw them away. And then I got one that really scared me. It was about some murder case in Arizona. There were horrible pictures on the front of this paper and up on top it was written, `Rosemary, this is what will happen to you if you don't start to love the bomb.`

Pauline Silvia: Oh, my word!

Rosemary Lynch: Well, that scared me. So I went down to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and I took these letters. I had saved the last two or three, but that one scared me. And I remember two agents came out and I showed them the letter, and they looked at each other, and that look told me everything. And they said, `Do you have any idea who could be sending these to you?` I said, `Yes. I think you did.`

Pauline Silvia: Good for you!

Rosemary Lynch: And they didn't say no. They just looked at each other. They said, `Well, if you get any more of these, you let us know.` I said, `Yes, I will.` But for a while I was afraid to be in the office alone and so I used to have somebody—before that I didn't have any fear at all, you know, people came and went and we helped them all we could. It was a little like social service center. Just two or three of us were working in there. I never had any fear. After that, a little bit, I did, because of this threat. But I never got another letter either.

M.T. Silvia: You beat them at their own game.

Rosemary Lynch: So I'm sure they sent it.

Pauline Silvia: You called them on it.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. But I thought that was sort of low.

Pauline Silvia: Very!

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. To scare me like that.

[00:02:28] End Track 5, Disc 1.

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

M.T. Silvia: —interesting to my mom.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, it's really interesting to meet you, you know, when I think of the variety of people that had connections to the test site.

Pauline Silvia: I have to be honest, I don't think about it.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, I'm living right on top of it, practically. It's almost impossible not to think about it. All our friends, and a lot of people who work out there, and it's in the newspaper every day.

M.T. Silvia: She's probably going to be glad to get home so she won't have to think about it anymore after this week.

Pauline Silvia: M.T. reminds me. It's her interest in it that gets me to thinking about things, because we came out here two, three years ago and we went through the Camp Mercury and it was nothing like—Yucca Flats and Frenchman Flats, yes, they were there, but there was nothing there really from when I was here in the fifties.

Rosemary Lynch: And now this stupid tunnel that they built for the storage of nuclear waste [Yucca Mountain project], and it's a terrible place to put—first of all, it's an earthquake zone. And then all that stuff that's left over from the test site is all out there. And it's within a few miles of a major city, a major metropolitan area. When we came, Las Vegas was a relatively small city. Now I don't know what the latest population figure is, but if you include the suburban areas, it has to be a million, it's a big city now. So why they want to haul that waste from everywhere and park it here—? I think it's a dangerous—there's already a lot of waste out there, a lot. Probably you've seen that, too.

M.T. Silvia: Yes, we saw that.

Rosemary Lynch: All those barrels that are decaying and everything, they're all buried out there. But now to transport it through the city is really a dangerous venture.

Pauline Silvia: Getting it here.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes, just getting it here.

M.T. Silvia: How did you start the Franciscan Center here?

Rosemary Lynch: There was a Franciscan priest [Louis Vitale], a good friend of mine that I've known for quite a few years, he was in California and I was over in Rome. And the then-Bishop of—the whole state of Nevada was one diocese, one Catholic diocese—the Bishop said, There's this whole area, the Westside of Las Vegas, very poor area, doesn't have any spiritual help of any kind. Would you be willing to come over and work there? Well, Louis had just finished getting his doctorate in sociology, so it was kind of interesting to him, so he called me up in Rome and he said, If I agree to go to Las Vegas, would you come?

I said, Louis, I still have six months on this job, and then when I come back I have to have some kind of reentry into the United States. I'm probably going to travel a little bit around visiting our Franciscan sisters in different places.

He says, Well, after that, will you come?

So I kind of thought it over and I said, Well, there's another sister coming with me. That was Sister Klaryta.

He says, Invite her to join, too, with us. We'll make this little Franciscan Center.

So after we came back and I kind of traveled around the country a little bit, visited our sisters in different places, he still was interested in coming over, and like I say, he just had gotten his doctorate in sociology. The Westside was very interesting to him because it was a very deprived area, and there was a lot of discrimination. In fact, when I-15 was built, they didn't even want to have an exit into West Las Vegas because it was such a poverty section. They

didn't want people coming into Vegas to know that we had this deprived area. No parks, no schools, no streetlights, no paved roads, nothing.

So we decided to come, and we rented a little house over there. It was continually being robbed and everything. We finally got a little burglar alarm and hung it in the window. And the thieves got clever; they pulled it out and threw it in a vacant lot where it was still beeping the next morning. And so they stole whatever they could find, which wasn't a whole lot, but anyway it was disturbing to us. And we lived in public housing, which was classified by HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] as one of the ten worst in the country for deprivation and poverty and hard times and single mothers. And I tell you, it was a wonderful place for us to live. It was very dangerous, but our neighbors were so protective of us and so good to us. So we lived there for fifteen years. And the only reason we left was because it **[00:05:00]** was before the Rodney King riots, a few days before [April 1992]. We knew there was disturbance in Los Angeles but we didn't think anything of it. And one of our neighbors came up with a gun and he said, `Look, I have this gun and I'll always protect you.`

We said to him, `We don't want you to shoot somebody to protect us.`

And I'll never forget his answer. He said, `I might have to.`

We said, `Well, then, we'd better move.`

So we found a place not too terribly far away, and four days later the riots broke out in our complex, and they burned down four buildings and there was really a lot of trouble, because it was a deprived area and a lot of injustices were going on. But we were happy there. I wouldn't exchange that phase of my life for anything. Our neighbors were wonderful and we have connections with them to this day.

So we moved out, and I was still going to this little center, and that's how I—the first summer I was there, we came in June—and the first thing I learned was we were sitting on the rim of this Nevada Test Site. And the reason I learned about it was because Jimmy Carter was arguing in the Congress. He wanted to get funds to build the neutron bomb. And we found out through—I'd already made friends with a few people that had a higher position in the test site and they said, `This bomb has already been built and has been tested out here on the test site.` So I realized that that was just part of a great big deception that was going on.

So we got a few friends together and we called ourselves—we gave ourselves an imposing title: *Citizens Concerned about the Neutron Bomb*. Well, these citizens were about ten people, but we started getting a lot of attention because of the neutron bomb publicity. And so on Hiroshima Day in 1977, we had come in June and this is August, we decided to go out to the test site. And there weren't any fences or any barricades or anything. It'll be the way you remember it where you drove right up to where the workers went in. And I never will forget that day. There was this marvelous sunrise came up and just like bathed a golden light all over these beautiful desert plants. But I was like struck by what I considered the horror going on behind that entrance there. So I kind of felt that whatever I was going to be doing, it would be connected with that, at least in the near future.

So we started going out whenever we heard that there was going to be a test because according to the treaty that we had signed with the then-Soviet Union, the tests had to be conducted underground and they had to be announced. But the way they announced them was sometimes the test was going to be at seven and they announced it at six a.m., so you had to be alert and right on the truck and go out. Because we wanted to be out there whenever they exploded a bomb. And I remember the first sign that we took, because we're Franciscan sisters,

had an image of Saint Francis [of Assisi] taming the wolf. I don't know if you know that beautiful legend. And we just had one word on it: "Convert." A few years later, we added "the Test Site," to convert it from the purpose to something more positive and beneficial to the human family.

So we're standing out there with our sign, and it was such a beautiful morning, like I said, this golden light coming up; I could only realize that what little I knew was so horrifying to me, about these bombs that were going off and how many people had been hurt and injured because of it, especially when they had these atomic clouds float over the cities. They always floated up kind of to the northeast. They didn't want them to go over the west because it would go over L.A. or come in the direction of Las Vegas. But a lot of people were in those little towns and settlements in Arizona, Utah, northern Nevada, and they had an outbreak of cancer all over there. So all that was so impressive to me and struck me so much that we did try to get out there every time there was an announced test. And if they announced it so late we couldn't go out, we went and stood in front of the Federal Building. I still have pictures of myself with my signs at all these places.

And like I say, we made a special point of making friends with the workers, with the head of the test site, General Mahlon Gates, I went personally to see him, and they were good people. For some of them, it was the first decent job they ever had in their life, and I'm sure you'll know **[00:10:00]** much more about this, the working part, than I do. But we tried to build relationships with them. So we would get out there very early before the literally thousands of people at that time. I don't know how it was when you worked there, but at that period there were 11,000 people connected with the test site, either out there on the scene or for the DOE [Department of Energy] here in Las Vegas. The office was a big office then.

So there were a lot of people that we felt were endangered by this, plus the fact that the whole city was in a dangerous situation if they had a leak or a mistake or a tragedy or something. And we started meeting these people that had been contaminated by these above-ground bombs and by, a couple of times, like the Baneberry test. Were you out there when the Baneberry test—

Pauline Silvia: No.

Rosemary Lynch: It split the desert full open and the cloud came up and drifted all around. A lot of people were exposed. So I made friends with all these people, and so it was like one thing led me to another.

And then in 1982, that was in 1977, so it was five years later, all those years I was sitting out there, many times by myself with my sign—I still have some photos left. This guy absconded with my best ones, but I still have some. Because I had friends among the journalists, and so some of them got interested, too, and so we started getting a little bit of publicity in the paper. And in 1982, it was the 700th anniversary of the birth of our patron saint, Saint Francis, so all the Franciscans on the coast and the handful of us here, we said, we don't want to just have a big celebration. We should do something to commemorate this 800th anniversary of the birth—he's the patron saint of peace. So a young guy who had just graduated from [the University of California at] Berkeley, Michael Affleck was his name, he and I toured all around Nevada, up to Oregon, California, Washington, all around the western states. And we decided we would spend the whole of Lent out in the desert near the test site, to honor our patron, instead of just having a big celebration in the church or something. We said, `We want to do something meaningful`.

So we invited everybody we could meet, young and old, groups that might be open to our proposal, to come to the test site. And like I say, there were no barriers or anything anywhere. We went right up to where the workers went in. And I still remember that it was such a beautiful

experience. We worked so hard. We made flyers and invited people and we spent the whole of Lent out there. And on Good Friday, we had the first act of civil disobedience. And we had the Way of the Cross, we carried this great big cross up. And because I was a friend with the guards and everybody, they asked me to take care of the cross. So they didn't arrest me, but they arrested a few other people. I still have pictures of that all somewhere. And they were booked and let go. They didn't get any imprisonment. But I had this great big cross. We planted it out there in the desert. And then I went again to my friend, General Gates, and I said, We've put that cross out there. I hope you won't do anything to it.

And he said, No, and he instructed all the people that worked [there] not to touch that cross, and it was out there for months.

Then once we went out, it was gone, so I called up right away, What happened to our cross?

They didn't know, so somebody had gone out and vandalized it or took it away.

M.T. Silvia: So the Franciscan Center, is that like an actual place that you formed?

Rosemary Lynch: It was a little office over on the Westside. We had just a tiny office. Years later, you know, its situation changed and we don't have it anymore like in the same form.

But then I remember, the first time that I was arrested, I had crossed over into the area we were not supposed to go, and you know I thought it was wonderful. They put the handcuffs on me, and my hands are so small and my wrists, they kept falling off, so it was not much of a threat to me. Later they got us these plastic handcuffs where they could adjust **[00:15:00]** the size of them. But I said, Put them on. I'll leave them on. I'll hold my hands up. So I didn't care.

And I had to go on trial. And the judge was a man named Bill Sullivan. He just died not long ago. And so we went, and I represented myself. I thought, I'm not going to rope any lawyer

into this stuff, so I went out, and a lot of friends went with me. They filled the little courthouse completely. And so in comes Judge Sullivan in all his robes and everything. And so I tried to explain why I did this. And the public defender [prosecutor] was attacking me and everything, you broke the law, you went into the forbidden space, you knew better, and all this. I said, Yes, I did, I broke the law and I knew better. OK. So Judge Sullivan condemned me to three days in jail. Then we came out of the courthouse and he's waiting there, still in his judicial robes, and he put his arms around me and he had tears, and he said, If I could follow my heart, I would call you innocent, but I have to follow the law. I said, That's OK. You know, I didn't mind. And he was a good man. And the public prosecutor, he resigned after that, a few weeks later. He said, I don't want to accuse her again.

M.T. Silvia: He knew you'd be back there?

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. So he turned out to be a friend.

M.T. Silvia: Oh, that's great.

Rosemary Lynch: So there were so many instances like that where people showed their goodness. We went out, this was really funny, this was Father Louis Vitale, the Franciscan priest, he was also arrested. Then we were taken out to Pahrump to this little courthouse, and the judge said—well, this was Good Friday, and he said, I'm going to give you all a citation and the bus will take you back to Las Vegas.

And so Louis Vitale, this Franciscan, stood up and he says, Your Honor, this is Good Friday. We know we broke the law. We did it intentionally. We think you should send us to jail, at least till Easter Sunday.

And he said, You have no constitutional right to go to jail.

So I thought that was a great sentence. He said, Go home.

M.T. Silvia: That's great.

Rosemary Lynch: So they gave us our citation papers and sent us home, because we didn't have any constitutional right to go to jail.

M.T. Silvia: That's a great story.

Rosemary Lynch: So many wonderful things like that happened, just like I have wonderful memories. And then many sad memories because of the people who had been killed by radiation, they lost family members, or you know all this tragedy that they had with their health and everything.

M.T. Silvia: I have one question I wanted to ask each of you, and you would answer it in your own way. How does your faith come into play with your experience with the Nevada Test Site?

Rosemary Lynch: Well, like I say, I'm a sister of Saint Francis, and Saint Francis has been declared the universal saint of peace, so we thought, Isn't it our mission, then, to try and in peaceful ways restore some kind of peace to the earth, to the Mother Earth that has been so damaged and so contaminated by these bombs? And like I say, you probably know stories about the life of St. Francis, how during his lifetime, during the height of the Crusades, he went on a crusade, but he went as a brother, and he went to visit the Sultan. He didn't go as an enemy. He went through the tents of the Sultan's whole army and he somehow, nobody knows how, he got to the tent of the Sultan which was very elegant. And the legend says that the Sultan put him through the test of fire, that he ran through the fire and he was uninjured. And then the Sultan was so impressed with him that he wanted to give him all kinds of beautiful gifts. And Francis did not accept anything except a little horn that he hung around his neck, made out of the animal horn, because he said that's what the Muslims used to call their people to prayer. Three times a

day they blew this horn. And the legend is that when he left, this great Sultan, whose name was Malik al-Kamil, he's famous in history of the East, said, "Woe is me if the knights of the West come armed only with love like this brother. As long as they come armed with their swords and their weapons, we can easily defeat them."

[00:20:00] And for me, that was part of the inspiration. We didn't want to go armed with anything except love, forgiveness, relationship. The man who was working at the test site, the police officer, they're my brothers, too, and people that have been hurt by the bomb are my sisters and brothers. The guy driving the truck, the guy driving the bus, we're all related. So I felt like that was a little bit my mission spiritually, to like try to imitate my patron from far away, to undertake that. That was part of my motivation. And I have to say, I was excited about it. I was thrilled with it. I made these friends.

M.T. Silvia: How would you answer that question? [addressing Pauline Silvia]

Pauline Silvia: I think that my realization came much, much later after 1953, and I can remember myself saying this once before and I think it helps to explain or to answer your question. It became a matter of conscience. God gave me a conscience but the Sisters of Mercy put a polish on it. And that polish kept getting better and better because I had gone back to school to Salve Regina [College] at different times and taken classes and that, so at that point my conscience had been pretty polished, and then it became a matter of conscience to me.

M.T. Silvia: And then how do Saint Benedict and Saint Francis, are they similar in their stories or what they did, now that you're an oblate in the Order of Saint Benedict?

Pauline Silvia: Well, the Benedictines certainly have directed me toward peace and the level of spirituality and listening to Sister, I think that Sister has a special connectedness to God that is so evident to me just meeting you. I can't define it, I can't describe it, but I just have a

sense that you have a special connectedness to God. The Benedictines helped me in terms of my spirituality, you know, problem-solving and the Way. Well, being a listener, that's one of the things that Benedict said all of the time, is to listen and then you learn to listen with the ear of your heart. And so that has helped me, I think, in terms of I think I'm a better listener and I think I do listen with the ear of my heart. But you have special connectedness to God.

Rosemary Lynch: We all have.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yours is special.

Rosemary Lynch: Every one of us has. I think each one of us has a special connectedness.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yes, but—

Rosemary Lynch: But you know, there's a beautiful connection between the Benedictines and the Franciscans. At the time of Saint Francis during the Middle Ages, there were no orders that were active or going out in the world or anything. And when Saint Francis felt called by God, the bishop didn't know what to do with him and wanted him to go into the Benedictine monastery. And in fact in Subiaco, where Saint Benedict was, there's a marvelous fresco painted during the lifetime of Saint Francis to remember his visit there. And Francis knew he wasn't called to that life. He was called to be down in the central plaza of the city, to lead the poor life that way. And it was very hard for him to get approval from the pope because it was something totally new in the Church. And the pope wanted him to go to the Benedictine order. So for six months, he went, and he worked in the monastery, and in his memory they have that fresco that I'm mentioning, beautiful, painted during his lifetime. If I can find a copy of it, I'll see that you get it from Subiaco, this image of Saint Francis. And he felt that God was calling him to the gospel life down in the marketplace, down in the city square, down where the people were; that he should not have anything, like the Benedictine monasteries who kept learning **[00:25:00]**

alive during the so-called Dark Ages and who were marvelous. But they were an enclosed order, and he felt he was called to be a mendicant, a poor man, one who wandered through the world and called people to the love of God, and that he would live in poverty. He didn't want to have possessions. And so that's how this order started. But he started really with the help of the Benedictines. They took him in their monastery for these few months and gave him the test. And so there's a tradition that on the Feast of Saint Benedict, the Franciscans, if you're living near the Benedictines, you take them a little bowl of fruit or something, a little gift to thank them for their kindness to Saint Francis, even though God's call for him was something totally different.

So that's kind of how that works between Francis and Benedict. And of course the Rule of Saint Francis is the last Rule that was approved by the Church. There are only four great Rules in the Church. The Benedictine Rule is one. The Franciscan Rule is one. The Basilian Rule is one. And what's the fourth one? It might be the Rule of Saint Gregory. But anyhow, there are only four religious Rules that are approved by the Church. All other orders have to accept one of these Rules. Even Saint Dominic had to adopt the Rule of Saint Benedict. There's no special Dominican Rule. He follows the Rule of Saint Benedict. So you see, Benedictines and Franciscans have connections on many levels.

M.T. Silvia: That's great. Can you guys think of any other questions, Rick, that you would think—?

Cameraman: Well, I'm just so profoundly impressed by both of you; frankly, just what I've learned in the last, well, just this afternoon with you and over the last couple of days with you, Pauline. It's obvious to me that spirituality has played very prominently into where you are and where you stand today relative to proliferation and just the development of a nuclear, I don't know what you'd call it. But I'm curious. It seems to me that sort of your rising

consciousness coincided with your becoming involved with the Benedictines and the story you told us yesterday about the person who directed you to the sister in Erie.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, Norvene Vest. Yes. Yes.

Cameraman: Yes, and that phone conversation you had. I mean is my understanding correct in that sense, that sort of where you are now, this consciousness that you have, that really is a result of your spiritual rebirthing, as it were, I guess.

Pauline Silvia: It started when M.T. and I made a visit to the Weston Priory and going into the bookstore. And as I went into the bookstore, it's not a very large bookstore but on the top of the shelf and just as I came in the door, I couldn't see anything else but this book, a workbook, and it said *Preferring Christ*. And it was the Rule of Saint Benedict as interpreted by Norvene Vest. And I was just absolutely drawn to that book cover and looked at it, I purchased it and started reading it; and did call Norvene Vest and she was very, very accommodating. I think the Lord works in your life all of the time, constantly, and I think in that way. The Lord was working in my life to bring M.T. and I together to go to that place, to get introduced to *Preferring Christ*, that concept, and the Benedictine Rule is becoming one way in which you can achieve that, and being encouraged by Norvene Vest and being directed to Sister Rita in Erie, Pennsylvania.

But you know, as you're going along and we talk about spirituality, one of the things that I have realized, and I try to point this out to people, is that you cannot take somebody's spiritual temperature. You can't do that. There's no unit of measure for spirituality. And you can **[00:30:00]** recognize it in somebody. You can have your own spirituality and I think it's highly independent. And my spirituality or my spiritual path would not necessarily work for anybody else, and indeed I wouldn't encourage anybody along that way. But again you just cannot take

somebody's spiritual temperature, and I think we make a big mistake when we try to do that. I'm in groups and I bring this up and I'll say, `well, what is your unit of measure for spirituality?` And they're sort of like, `Well, what do mean?` [And I asked], `Well, how do you measure it? Tell me what your unit of measure is.` And it sort of makes people begin to think. But you cannot measure somebody's spiritual temperature.

Rosemary Lynch: I read a beautiful story about Gandhi once that certain teachers or people that have kind of a spiritual power, which was called *darshan*, and also sacred images have this like the power that kind of reaches out to you or comes to you when you're in the presence of someone or maybe the sacred image or something. And Gandhi used to stand often in front of this image which was sacred to him to kind of receive the *darshan* from this sacred image. And at the end of his life, people stood before him to receive the *darshan* from him. And I think that's such a beautiful idea because undoubtedly Gandhi was a great spiritual leader and figure and gave his life really to try and promote the peaceful transition of his people from the oppression of the British Empire and so on. But he was one of the great prophets of nonviolent way, what he called *Satyagraha*. He found the word for it. We haven't found the word in English yet. I don't like the word "nonviolence" because it's a negative. It's just when you're not violent. But this *Satyagraha*—Gandhi made up the word—is the power of truth and love. What a beautiful thought, that truth and love have power, and that's what he called the *Satyagraha*. So we're looking for a word, too, in English that describes this same power as the *Satyagraha*, and we haven't found one yet. "Nonviolence" doesn't do it at all. It just means the absence. If I don't knock you down or something, but it doesn't describe that spiritual power that you're talking about.

I'd like to see if we have this picture of Saint Francis from Subiaco that was painted during his lifetime by an unknown Benedictine brother. I'm going to ask Klaryta to look and see if we have it, so excuse me just a moment.

M.T. Silvia: OK.

Sound Engineer: I had a question. This is actually a very different subject in some ways, but just in the context of your work at the site, you know we talk about transparency in government a lot nowadays and that sort of thing, and in your days in working at the site, there was such a practice of secrecy because of everything being classified. As you've come to these other things and ways of looking at things, was it difficult for you to go from having to keep so many secrets to being more open in some ways? I mean it was such a practice for years, things being classified. Have you been at all aware of any changes of how you deal with truth and different things?

Pauline Silvia: You know, in terms of material being classified, our whole work environment was structured around secrecy. I think I mentioned this before that I worked in a building that had multiple areas, different areas of research, but I had no idea of what this group was doing or what this group was doing; I didn't find myself sharing our information with any other group, so it just seemed as if it was all compartmentalized. And you **[00:35:00]** know it's interesting you should ask me that because my experience later on in nursing administration and working with students, the one thing that people would remind me about or remark about me was that I would be able to keep a confidentiality, and it sort of goes all the way back to that, that no matter what happened, I was always thinking in terms of confidentiality for all people involved. And so maybe that, in my later life, became a hangover from what we're talking about, keeping secrets. I don't know if that answers your question.

Sound Engineer: Well, that's a positive aspect to having practiced that classified work. Did you ever experience a less positive consequence in that?

Pauline Silvia: You know I just keep thinking about this, that there was 1953 in my life, OK? And then all of a sudden comes 1992, and in between there, I have to tell you honestly that 1953 did not play an important part in my life, as much as it is right here and now today, much more so today. But 1953 all the way through to 1992, I didn't deal with that at all. Now that may be something in my makeup that maybe I can really compartmentalize things, put them out.

M.T. Silvia: I remember you in the early eighties contacting me about a doctor who was studying radiation illness in Berkeley. And that was in the early eighties, and that was the beginning of us having a real dialogue about it. I don't know if you remember that.

Pauline Silvia: No, I don't. You know, if you ask me the question now, there's a lot of things that I can't really remember and be specific about. A lot of things I don't remember.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, our memory edits certain things out as we grow older, and then something triggers the memory, you know, you come and meet somebody or you find a passage in a book. Oh, I knew about that, I remember when. And then it comes back to you. But by the time you reach my age, your memory has already accumulated so much of experience, of reading, of encounters.

M.T. Silvia: There's only so much room up there to keep it in.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. Well, the nature of our mind is focal, and so what we're focusing on is very present to us. The rest of the things kind of recede. And at times, like you say, something will bring it back to the center, and then we have it back again. Like I haven't thought of these early days at the test site for a long time either because now my life started taking different pathways. I went to Europe and had many invitations to go and give lecture series in different

countries. And so even the test site experiences are not in the focus of my mind all the time like they were for a while when I was going out there all the time.

Pauline Silvia: Well, there's another thing that just crossed my mind, is that 1953, 1954, 1955, you have to stop and think about where I returned to. I returned to the island, to Newport [Rhode Island], and what would be going on in that environment, socially or whatever, professionally, whatever, to make that connectedness, that just didn't exist. And there are many of my friends who didn't even know that I was in the service. I just didn't talk about it. And then there are many of my friends who were surprised to find out that I was in the service and I did do work, research with nuclear energy and that sort of thing. So I didn't go back and start telling my story, if you will.

M.T. Silvia: How is it to tell your story now?

Pauline Silvia: Well, there's a part of me that it's exciting in a way, but then there's the part of me that, it's sort of brings me all back to some of that, you know, which parts **[00:40:00]** of it I don't want to go back to, really, to be honest. So that's an honest statement.

M.T. Silvia: What part of it is exciting to you?

Pauline Silvia: Well, the fact that my daughter is that much interested, so interested in me in terms of my experiences, and how you reminded me that my story, if you will, is actually our story, yours and mine. It's exciting to meet all these new people and to meet Sister, and Mary, and Loretta [Sound Engineer], and Rick [Cameraman].

M.T. Silvia: Yes, these are great people, aren't they?

Cameraman: I'm curious, Pauline, what do you think is to be learned, and I don't mean just from you personally, but as humankind or even our American society, what do you think is the great lesson or the great lessons to be learned from your experience of having

been in the Navy and done that one thing—had a certain consciousness or you might consider a lack of consciousness—and then having come years later to this other place of awareness? I mean do you think there's a lesson for all of us on a progress scale to learn from that?

Pauline Silvia: Well, I think that the lesson is not necessarily, what I would say is not necessarily based on my experience but the lesson is to recognize responsibility and to be able to accept responsibility and follow through with responsibility, and we don't see that happening, I think. This whole atomic experiment, if you will, is one of where nobody's really responsible for the effects, but I think a lesson is that somebody has to become responsible.

Cameraman: I mean do you think that that's an individual responsibility or is it more of a collective or national responsibility? For instance, when you speak of responsibility—

Pauline Silvia: I think responsibility starts with the individual, and the individual then disseminates his responsibility to others, and then it becomes collective responsibility.

[00:42:57] End Track 1, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 2.

Cameraman: You know, that's part of that, and my sense is that you feel a lot of personal responsibility on a certain level. But my sense of it from where I sit is quite the opposite. And I just feel like I have to say that to you because I feel that you were doing a great thing, doing your duty in essence; but somewhere there, in doing your duty, that there was a certain compromise on another level, and I see that you have suffered from that. And I'm very sorry about that as an individual, knowing you as I do, but on a greater sense, in a greater sense for all of us. To me that's a wrong.

Pauline Silvia: I have to be honest, I can't talk about it. Please.

Cameraman: And I understand that and I appreciate that, but I just want to tell you from where I am.

Pauline Silvia: I appreciate what you've said and I will internalize it and process it. Thank you.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, I think that's part of wisdom, what you just said, to realize when we look at our life's picture that maybe now, from the experience that we've had and the age that it has accumulated, the years that have rested on us, we might wish that some things were other than they were. I think that happens in every life. But we're only given a day at a time, and we're lucky if wisdom comes to us a little bit at a time, that we can view those things with a more objective sense. If I could live the fifties over or the sixties over, I probably would do a lot of things different, because now I'm looking at them with a maturity that all these years, these experiences, these observations, these friendships have given to me, so I have different eyes, different lenses that I'm looking through. But the main thing was, at the time we were, whatever we were doing, we were doing it with our full heart, with our intentions being good. That's the only thing we're going to be judged on. Maybe now I think I could've been more involved here. I could've informed myself better about this. I could've, you know, all this. We can all say that, looking back at our life. But the main thing is that we're given a new day every morning and that's how we do this, with the light we have right now. And your coming here and our talking together, that's the light that we're given for today.

Pauline Silvia: It's a beautiful light.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes, it kind of helps me to think of that, that we're given the light of this encounter and of the photographer and the assistants and of everybody, your daughter, Sister Klaryta with all her work with the people. This doesn't happen by chance. We were brought

together for this moment, and this moment will live in our memory, in our thoughts. And so you have something that you can give to all of us out of your experience that you're kind of distilling, this wisdom, and even the sorrow that goes with it, and so on. Me, too, I say, how could I have been so unaware when I was young? But it's only because our age gives us these new eyes and we look and we see things in a different light. That's how it is. So many things, too, our memory kind of puts aside, and that's how our life, you know is patterned. We don't have to live our whole life. At my age, and I'm eighty-eight years old, well, I can't relive everything. I went through so many vicissitudes, so many periods in my life. I think I told you I went through my anti-American period. Well, now I realize, probably with more maturity I would've been able to look at that whole African thing maybe in a different way, but I was profoundly affected by it and I felt profoundly responsible. I saw this woman on her hands and knees looking for a little bit of food for the baby on her back. It broke my heart, and I kept saying, `How can we tolerate this? How can we allow this?` And that vision haunted me for a long time. And so we go **[00:05:00]** through these phases and maybe out of this, some wisdom gets distilled a little bit that we can't always pass on. It'll happen to each one of us as we grow older. The main thing is, I like this thought from a—he's Jewish, a great psychiatrist, Abraham Maslow,. And he says we all carry our past with us, but some people carry their past like an undigested meal. It's here and it's causing them pain and discomfort. Other people carry their past like a digested meal, that the body is able to cast off or our spirit can cast off the parts that were useless, but the other parts of our experience, they give us strength, they give us courage, they are assimilated by the body and assimilated by the soul, just like a meal is assimilated. So that's how we carry our past, either like a knot inside of us, or if we can assimilate it some way, we can kind of let go the negative parts, just like the body eliminates what isn't useful, and we can abstract from that whatever

wisdom is to be learned. You've learned wisdom from your experiences, painful as it is to look back, but you were not then, twenty or thirty years ago, the woman you are today. And so, this is that undigested meal and the digested meal is what has given you the strength and the courage and the wisdom to talk and to see and to understand things that we didn't understand when we were younger. That's always been a comfort to me to think. I thought Abraham Maslow made a very good comparison there.

M.T. Silvia: That's a great analogy.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes. Get rid of all that stuff that's not any good for your body.

M.T. Silvia: Well, I think this is a good place to stop, don't you? Thank you so much.

Pauline Silvia: Thank you, Sister.

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, thank you. Thank you. It was lovely to meet you.

Pauline Silvia: It's been great meeting you. Oh. A lot to think about.

Rosemary Lynch: Spiritual connection.

Pauline Silvia: Yes. Big one.

M.T. Silvia: Do you have your gift for her?

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yes. I brought you a gift from Newport.

Rosemary Lynch: Oh, thank you! Shall I open it?

Pauline Silvia: Yes.

Sound Engineer: I think it matches your sweater, Rosemary. You must've known she'd look so good in that blue.

Rosemary Lynch: I told her that my father was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and all my relatives on my father's side still live in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, around there, so I'm kind of connected to that part of the world.

As a good Franciscan, I reuse everything.

Pauline Silvia: Recycle.

Rosemary Lynch: Some future gift will be wrapped in this paper.

Pauline Silvia: Being a good steward of the earth.

Rosemary Lynch: I'm trying to undo it without destroying it.

Oh, for heaven's sake. Isn't that nice.

Pauline Silvia: And here's the famous Saint Mary's Church. I went to grammar school there and my grammar school would've been right up behind the church here. That's where I went to school.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes, I was saying, my father was born in Providence, Rhode Island and all my cousins still live back in Rhode Island or Massachusetts. They're all around in this general area. That's a beautiful gift. Thank you.

M.T. Silvia: That's the church [John F.] Kennedy got married in.

Pauline Silvia: Oh, yes, that's right. Kennedy was married in that church.

Rosemary Lynch: In this church? Oh. Oh, that's beautiful. Oh, I'm sure all my cousins back there know this area well. I would still like to go back and visit them once more before I die. I've only been there once in all these years, and that was when I came back from Europe. And that was so interesting because I had never seen these cousins, and they were going to meet me at the airport in Boston when I came back from Europe with Klaryta. And I thought, will I even know **[00:10:00]** them? I've never seen them, these aunts and cousins. And here's this whole field of people out there. I knew immediately I saw them. They all had the Lynch look so I knew.

M.T. Silvia: That's great.

Rosemary Lynch: That's because you're related to them. They looked so much like my immediate family. Oh, I love this. It's beautiful.

[00:10:25] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[End of interview]