

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

**Interview with**  
**Julia Occhiogrosso**

**June 17, 2004**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**

Interview Conducted By  
Suzanne Becker

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## Interview with Julia Occhiogrosso

June 17, 2004 in Las Vegas, NV

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

**Suzanne Becker:** *Great. I guess first of all I'd like to just begin by, you know, your name and sort of your history, a little bit about yourself, where you're from, where your family's from, how long you've been in Vegas, sort of how you ended up in Las Vegas, that sort of thing?*

**Julia Occhiogrosso:** My name is Julia Occhiogrosso. I was born in Brooklyn, New York and my family, most of my family is still in New York. I come from an Italian-American background. I was raised Catholic. And I came west in 1979 when I graduated from high school, first time, to visit my sister Rosemary who was living up in a Los Angeles Catholic Worker house. And I came out to just visit her; I'm a twin, and my twin and I both came out. And that was the way I was introduced to the Catholic Worker, that visit. And so I went and spent that summer. And then I went back east to continue—I had started college, central New York, Cortland University, a state university. And I finished that year and was invited to go back to the Los Angeles Catholic Worker to work for them. The first year, I was just visiting. And so that following summer, I went back and volunteered, helping with the program for children that lived on Skid Row. And that summer I was really moved by the work there and decided to leave school and join the Catholic Worker in Los Angeles. And so I finished another year, a second year, of college but had already made the decision that I was going to be leaving to join the community. So 1982, I joined the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community and participated in all of their work. And major growth there for me in terms of self-understanding and

understanding what I wanted to do. And 1986 I moved from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and started a Catholic Worker here in Las Vegas.

*Wow. So you came to Las Vegas specifically for the reason of starting a Catholic Worker here.*

*What drew you to the—?*

Well, originally it was in right around 1984, I think it was Lent of 1984 or 1985, I'm not remembering the dates, but I came out to the test site for a Lenten vigil started by the Nevada Desert Experience. And it was during a lot of transition in the community that I was a part of in L.A. And during that time in the desert, during Lent, I had this idea that it would be a powerful witness to have a Catholic Worker in Las Vegas. So I brought that idea back to the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community, who were at first reluctant and kind of wondering how they could connect to something so far from L.A., but in the end supported the idea of my coming out to Las Vegas and starting a Catholic Worker here. So they just kind of commissioned me, so I ended up coming out in I guess August of 1986 and starting a Catholic Worker here. And then I've been with the Catholic Worker ever since then.

*Can—I'm sorry to interrupt.*

No, that's OK.

*I'm just wondering if you could just talk a little bit about the Catholic Worker, the philosophy, the mission?*

**[00:05:00]** Sure. The Catholic Worker is a lay movement connected with the Catholic Church that started in the 1930s in New York, 1933, and its founding members are Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. And Dorothy was a young convert to Catholicism. She was a journalist, and she was involved in the radical social movements during the 1930s in New York. So she was a Socialist at one point and she was very much influenced by the ideas of Socialism. And she had

her own faith journey which led her to conversion to Catholicism, and in the 1930s, for her, it represented a church of the poor. And her understanding of the Gospels integrated into an understanding of how to change the world, you know, how to effect social change.

So she met up with Peter Maurin. Peter Maurin was a philosopher schooled in France, grew up in France, came to the United States and kind of traveled around. And he was a little bit of an eccentric philosopher, but he had this whole vision of the way contemporary Christians could live their faith and effect social change.

So their paths crossed. Dorothy at the time had converted to Catholicism and felt that she was being called to a, you know, something of a vocation but didn't know what it was. And she had been connected to the kind of radical social community in the Village [Greenwich Village], New York during the 1930s. You know, if you saw the movie *Reds*, well that was all her contemporaries. OK? And she knew quite a number of those folks. But because of her choice to join the Church, she had become somewhat estranged from that network of support, so she just was kind of searching what this faith call meant. And so at the time, I mean the story is that she was this journalist and she was writing for *Commonweal*, which is like a liberal Catholic publication, and she actually was in Washington, D.C. covering a big march but she felt this like alienation from all her radical friends, and she went into a church and she kind of prayed, what is this call?

When she came back to New York, Peter Maurin was at her door, wanting for her to listen to his ideas about the Church and *et cetera*, and he had this heavy French accent and he was kind of like a street person, and she almost like didn't let him in. And she was living with her sister-in-law who was Spanish. She always says her Spanish hospitality was really what brought Peter into her apartment. They were in a tenement, you know, a small apartment in New York. So anyway, he came in, they started talking, and she was kind of listening to him, and he

mentioned this idea of a newspaper to spread these ideas, and it just clicked with her because she was a journalist, and this idea of a newspaper to spread these ideas was living the Gospel.

So the Catholic Worker started with a newspaper and it still exists today, called *The Catholic Worker*, and it is a newspaper basically expresses a lot of the vision. But that's how it started. So they got this newspaper together, they gave it out at Union Square in New York, penny a copy. It still goes for a penny a copy today.

So anyway, they were the founding visionaries of the movement, and over time it [00:10:00] developed until today there are hundreds of Catholic Worker houses all over the country and in Europe, Canada, you know, internationally there are expressions of the Catholic Worker. And it's decentralized, so it's not like an order. It's not like a religious community. It is very consciously from the very beginning decentralized, so there's no one governing body that—  
*So they're all sort of independent.*

Independent houses that—

*Franchises, sort of.*

Yes, but they're not even franchises in that they're not connected so much with each other. I mean some of the houses, like when I was in L.A. I was the first person from that community to start a house here, and then L.A. started to help other folks that came through to start other houses. So there are a number of houses that were born out of L.A., but independent financially as far as the decision-making about the community, and that comes from the tradition that Dorothy synthesized of Christian anarchy in the sense that the best model for decision-making is let the people who are involved in the life of the community are the ones that are involved in making the decisions, and so most houses have consensus model decision-making.

But they're all very different expressions of the vision that was articulated through the newspaper, you know, that was expressed through the newspaper. Now since the movement was started with the paper, most Catholic Worker houses have kept that tradition of having some kind of newsletter or newspaper. So a lot of the tradition has been written down over time. You know, she wrote a number of books, Dorothy wrote, and Peter, he published *Easy Essays*, his philosophical verses on the way the world should be. And so there's a lot written, and so most houses have an idea of what the Catholic Worker is about through those writings.

So anyway, so a lot of what we've done at the test site comes out of this tradition of the radical gospel, living the radical gospel, of, you know, addressing the works of mercy, living the works of mercy which are, you know, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, in a very personal way, but also addressing the issues of injustice that cause poverty and also, you know, the issues of violence and injustice.

*And so that is the link with the test site.*

Right. So the test site represents, nuclear weapons represents, a grave violation from a Catholic Worker perspective of what our Creator would want for the world, and it violates the sacredness of life. See? So you know, the idea of war. The Catholic Worker is—Dorothy was always, you know, they were always against war—there was a pacifist movement—and from early on wrote in that light, opposed the, you know, all the wars, and from a faith perspective, the perspective that this is a violation of life and the life of the spirit. So everything, you know—abortion, capital punishment, the death penalty, you know, I mean the death penalty, all of the life issues across the board. And so, Catholic Worker basically doesn't have a party line *per se*, but it comes from being faithful to a certain vision and our understanding of the Gospels.

*I don't want to say philosophical but there is—*



Well, the vision, it's just a synthesis of a radical gospel message, called the Radical Gospel, going to the roots of the gospel message and the roots of the Church tradition really, the [00:15:00] teachings of the Church. So anyway, that's always been part of the Catholic Worker tradition. And that's how I found myself out at the test site. And it's very similar to the Franciscan charism. I would say almost every piece of the beliefs and values of the Franciscan charism fits with Catholic Worker. But of course they're a huge institution, whereas the Catholic Worker is still to this day a decentralized movement.

*But it seems like everybody, I mean, is out there together.*

Right, but the thing is, Dorothy always felt like when you centralize something, then you centralize power, decision-making, that it keeps you—she thought it was very important to stay kind of precarious and not to have a lot of power, so that you stay close to the people that you're in solidarity with. So there's a whole thing about voluntary poverty, about living simply, there's all these beliefs and values. And it's this kind of connection to social justice issues like nuclear weapons and war.

*So sort of with that perspective, I'm wondering if you could maybe just talk about what, you know, the first time that you got out to the test site and did an action and participated in something, you know, kind of what your memories of that are and what that was like, and was it what you thought it would be or how—? Talk a little bit about it, what—*

You know, I don't recall having a clear expectation of what it would be like, but I do recall being surprised on a certain level, or experiencing something very powerful. The first time that I went to the test site was during Lent, and at the time there was just a few of us who were in town. We were staying at an apartment that Nevada Desert Experience had rented. And the idea was that

we would go in the morning to greet the workers as they were going out to, you know, going out by bus or car to the work site, and we would vigil out there, and then we would gather for prayer.

*Where were they heading out from when you went to greet them? Was that—?*

We were out on the road and they were driving past us, and we were just going to wave at them, and then we would pray out in the desert. I mean we'd just be alone out there, we'd have sharing, people who were vigiling would sit together after their time and talk about their experiences, and then we'd have time alone in the desert. And so we did this each day. So then we'd come back and then the next day we'd go out again. And still to this day, when I go out to that place, that sacred space, there's something that connects deep inside of me that says, this is an important place to be. And for different reasons over a different period of time, I think at that time [pause] I just think that there was something very moving about being in this place of such great beauty, and then having the awareness of the testing that was happening there. So you have this great [00:20:00] beauty and then this great violence right next to each other. And perhaps it mirrored for me in a deep way that I wasn't even aware of then the sacredness and woundedness that exists in each of us. So for me, maybe in a deep way, it was kind of mirroring who I was, and kind of facing the truth of that, that's just a very powerful thing to do. So I mean I'm just coming to that as I'm talking to you because I can't build it. I don't think I knew that then. I wrote an article that actually got published in the [Las Vegas] *Sun* that week. It was "Hope in Desert Places," "Hope in the Desert," or something, you know, and the reason it got published was because I wrote it and then someone from the community got a hold of it and they submitted it to I think the *Sun* or the *R-J* [Las Vegas Review-Journal], I don't even remember, I think it was the *Sun*. It was the Op-Ed or something. But it probably more accurately captures what I was actually going through that week. It was very, very powerful. Like I said before, it was where I

thought it would be very powerful to bring the Catholic Worker witness to this place and make the connection between that space, that place, and the witness of serving the poor.

*Sort of sounds like there was not necessarily an epiphany but it definitely had a profound impact.*

*And have you since been fairly committed to going back? I mean it sounds like you've been out there quite a bit.*

Yes. Oh, I would definitely say I mean at least once a year, but it's more than that. I mean presently I'm going out, you know, we're going out in August, we went for, you know, Holy Week. I'm taking two young people that are coming to the Catholic Worker for an internship. We're going to spend some time out there. I think that it speaks for itself out there and that it offers something that teaches us, that space teaches us something that people who are on a spiritual journey can learn and benefit from more than anything you try to tell them. There's something about it I don't even understand completely or I haven't unpacked completely.

*Just from the mere fact of being out there and experiencing the vastness of the land.*

Oh absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. And I've organized a lot of different events, and it's so funny because no matter what happens—so usually the course of the event would—a number of events where I've organized where, you know, we do stuff in town and then we go out to the test site, kind of, and it's almost like no matter what goes on or how successful or not successful it is in town, the workshops or whatever you do, once you've been out to the test site, all that is healed. It's almost like it takes over. And I think, you know, I've done a lot of reflection on my own on this and I think it has to do with the great archetype of the desert, you know, and what that represents to the unconscious, and then how ancient that is for us; how it impacts people in that way. So yes, I do, I think it's just this sacred space and then [00:25:00] what the development of nuclear weapons represents, the violence that it represents, and putting those two things together.

*Yes, I think it is a very profound experience to be out there.*

Have you been out there?

*Yes. Yes. One of my first thoughts was similar, just like this is amazing land, this is, you know, it's the desert and it's beautiful and it seems very sacred and it seems very spiritual, and it was just very odd to think like here is this absolute beauty and then to know what it's used for so, I think that that can be a very profound connection. I found that I sort of had a similar experience in that, and I guess I'm just wondering, I think that the people that I've spoken with, that's been a very common thread that everybody has talked about; just that it's very spiritual, I mean just being out there in the desert alone is very spiritual. So, in reading Butigan's book he talks about that also, and talks about—I'm not quite sure how I want to phrase it. I guess along with the spirituality out there, it seems like there are a lot of rituals that go along with organizing an action. I mean I'm wondering if you can talk about some of that, and also whether or not you think—?*

Oh, so the way it's orchestrated, does it affect the spiritual experience?

*Yes, yes, and I think, you know, does one enhance the other?*

I think it could. I have found, and I love to do ritual out there, I have found the simpler it is, the better, because as I said before, it's like if you just allow the desert to speak, you know, you kind of put some things in there but don't [pause] don't try too much. That's my own thought on it. But [pause] I think one of the first rituals that I experienced was organized by the Nevada Desert Experience and it was—after I'd done the Lenten experience and then I came back I think in August for our witness in August, and they had the Franciscans out there and they were in the robes, and we at that time were able to walk from what is now the “Trespass” line, we were walking, somehow we were able to be past that line and walking to, is it Yucca Flats? Not—

what's it called? Anyway, we were just walking like in a procession, but before we started walking each person was draped with a crane, the symbol of a paper crane, and kind of commissioned to walk by all the Franciscans. So all of that symbol together, but it was very simple, and that just walking, being commissioned, walking, and kind of you're with people but you're in solitude because you're walking single file in this procession in silence with this being, you know, empowered in the sense to do that. That was very powerful for me.

**[00:30:00]** One time we did one during Palm Sunday and the theme was "Stay awake," and we were using the things in nature to make the ritual, like somebody hitting rocks together, you know, and it was really—and it was "Stay awake!" We were going to shout it onto the test site. Oh, I mean there was just so many different rituals. The Stations—

*Yes, could you talk about that?*

Well, you know, the Stations of the Cross, if you're familiar with that, you're trying to recall the journey of Jesus, you know, on the walk up Calvary. And so we bring a milk crane out there and we have these placards, these black-and-white photographs that represent kind of contemporary versions of that walk and the Stations. So the first photograph, for example, is an electric chair.

*Oh wow, that's pretty powerful.*

And so everyone who comes participates, and someone stands on the crate and holds the photograph up, then we have the reading. Someone wrote this kind of script of the Stations and they state, you know, the first Station and then they kind of talk about what happened and then it gives a contemporary comparison. And they're just simple like this in line all the way, you know, down towards the test site where people will cross the line, and you're just kind of moving on this journey, and as you're walking sometimes we kind of walk with a wooden cross and we'll either play it, you know, in time of the beat of a drum or just sing a refrain, "Carry it on,

carry it on.” But it’s just this kind of feeling of being part of a journey and part of [pause] just by being there and being there in that kind of peripheral way, that you’re almost doing something to the land, to the space, and to any kind of movement towards nuclear annihilation, you’re kind of interrupting. And that’s, you know, not something very tangible but something that you feel like you’re a part of. And if you go there, you can see little representations of *so* many people that have been there, you know, whether it’s something that’s wrapped around the barbed wire fencing or little altars that have been built of stone or—it’s just this kind of somehow you feel like—I have felt like just that energy from all these people who are desiring something different, and they’re up against this *huge* [pause] nuclear weapons, you know, the arms race, and this small voice, and yet I feel like there’s an energy there, a power, that’s kind of unleashed.

*Yes. So what you’ve described, you know, might be a very different experience and way of protesting this site as opposed to, say, a group in town that’s organized, that’s kind of anti-nuke to begin with, and they go up to the test site and they protest. Do you think that it’s different or do you—?*

Yes, yes, I do. I think that for the Catholic Worker and for the Nevada Desert Experience there’s a lot of foundation and it’s built on a foundation of active nonviolence, born [00:35:00] out of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and so a lot of what we practice comes from being informed in that tradition. And so there is strategy in terms of the big picture, you know, wanting to close the test site, working towards a comprehensive test ban treaty, so there is, especially for Nevada Desert Experience, there have been really campaigns to work towards these goals. So they incorporate clear strategy. Yet, and just like Martin Luther King, I mean he wanted to change the law, and so there is organizing, there’s strategizing, there’s looking at it all from that perspective. But there’s also, at least I can say from the Catholic Worker, this sense that there is

possibly a power that's operative in testing those principles of nonviolence, experimenting with them, and incorporating them into the strategy. You know, it wasn't accidental that Rosa Parks sat on that bus and decided not to get up. She had been schooled in nonviolence. It wasn't accidental that children went out into the streets. So in the same way, over the years at the Nevada Test Site, there's just been a certain tone and a certain conscious way of being that is meant to be as much a part of the change as anything else.

*Yes. Again, and I think maybe you even said it in Butigan's book, looking at the civil disobedience as a journey and that even part of crossing over the line, which is now a cattle guard, I guess, a part of that journey. It's sort of a process.*

Right. And you know, some people come out there and for them even a symbolic trespass is a profound step, and so they take those steps gradually.

*And so there is actual significance to, say, being arrested?*

Yes.

*To the act of, or the process of?*

Yes. You know, I think that a lot of people experience that really differently, of course. But I'm convinced that there's something going on there that we don't even know. [laughter] Like we really don't. We don't really get it. Because I mean I'm not very, what's the word, kinesthetic or bodily, you know, and I can feel energy when I go out there. When I go out there, I just feel a certain kind of *pheww* [sigh]. There's just something about this place.

*Which possibly goes back to maybe being sacred land?*

Yes. Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

*Way, way before the test site was ever founded.*

Right. Yes. But I think that there's—see, some people will say, well, being a pacifist and all those faith-based actions, you know, how effective are they? And then others will say well, if you just do strategizing and trying to be effective without doing, you know, the faith work or the interior work, that you're just repeating the cycles of violence. And I agree with that, and I agree that—people who understand active nonviolence, and we have grown over the years and continue to grow and continue to need to grow, what that [00:40:00] means to do active nonviolence witness out there, it integrates both those. It integrates really methodical analysis of the situation, strategizing, trying to affect real specific goals, tangible, but it does the work also of the people who are actually involved in that organizing, doing their own looking at their violence, so that the violence of the arms race, you know, there's the arms race within, and if you are just trying to kind of change what's out there without trying to look at the parallels of violence, then you'll end up just recreating a violent system. And it's got to be both. And so that's one of the things that makes the faith witnesses different than to, say, a secular demonstration out there. It's just that, or at least in my experience I mean, is that both those things are happening, that there's some kind of awareness that we are complicit in this violence. It's not *them* out there, those folks at the test site.

*Everyone is involved.*

Yes, that we're all part of this violence, and so we're repentant when we go out there, or that we're part of it and we don't see the test site workers as the *evildoers* but that we are all part of it, you know, that our consumption choices are related to what the test site—or our lifestyle choices are related to the arms race and are related to poverty in the world. So there's transformation that's happening but it has to happen for the people who are participating in the resisting of the test site as well as the test site itself or the people, you know. So it's really a



really different way of approaching it, and that's what active nonviolence is about. It's about really embracing the woundedness and sacredness in ourselves and in the world and in, you know, the test site worker and the police and not having this kind of sense that somehow we're separate from that.

*I think that makes sense, and particularly if I'm understanding it correctly in the grand scheme, to do an action against something like the test site in order for that to change, it can change all at once but if we, the collective "we," continue to live in the cycles that create that, that change cannot be had.*

Right, there's no real transformation that occurs, the deepest transformation, and of course it's slow and, you know, seemingly ineffective at times because you're facing this big, overwhelming issue and you're doing these little faithful witnesses.

*Have you seen change? Do you think there has been change? Particularly now that you've been doing this for a while, I mean have you seen changes?*

Well, I mean you can name some certain things. I mean there was the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and there were things that happened like in Kazakhstan there's a whole movement that was born out of this connection to the Nevada Desert Experience. It actually was called the Nevada Movement, and they shut down their test site in Kazakhstan. I mean I can't name all the different things that were born or yielded out of people coming out to the test site, but I'm certain that there have been people who have left, who have come to the test site, gone to wherever they were in their community, and affected some.

*Right.*

And so you can't measure that. I mean there were some attempts to try to do that, and I don't know how successful that was, and I am sure that there are many stories that I'm just not able to

think about. But there is this sense in active nonviolence that when you look at the stages of a social movement, that we often feel ineffective because we don't understand what those stages [00:45:00] are, but if you look at what's supposed to happen in each of those stages, if that's happening, then you're reaching your objective.

If I could just get up for a second.

[Pause]

See, this is a publication of *Pace e Bene* and this is by Ken Butigan. Have you ever seen this?

*I haven't seen that.*

Well, this is on active nonviolence—it's a ten-part process to reach a practice of active nonviolence, and I wanted to show you this. It's the little chart on the phases. See, the "Eight Stages of a Successful Social Movement," and this is by Bill Moyers, so this is—

*Is this—OK.*

This is by—let's see, I think this is Bill Moyers work here, but it just demonstrates that point. If you have this kind of consciousness and you're organizing events, this is what sustains the energy to keep working towards your goals. And this is kind of what a lot of organizers from the faith community are kind of grounded in this—

*Interesting.*

And it goes through these cycles. So even though we achieve this Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, *per se*, and you know there's no doubt that thousands of people are getting arrested at the test site and, you know, that these had influence over policy over time, you know. There's no doubt. A lot of the larger events were organized by like American Peace Test and, you know, and they were considered like a secular peace movement, but the fact that they were out there was somewhat related to the fact that people have been out there, you know, the faithful. So anyway.

*So to sort of shift gears a little bit, but along the same lines, I'm just curious what your interactions with the test site workers have been.*

I haven't had a lot of interactions. I haven't had a lot of personal interactions with the test site workers, but I do recall that there was a period of time which you're probably familiar with where there was a little bit more of an active group of folks who worked at the test site who would come out to any kind of events and actions. In fact, some of the pictures that I showed you before took place during events like that.

*With the people laying down?*

Yes, and I just remember for that particular action it was in August and these guys were laying on the ground, and then on one side of the road were mostly like peace protesters, and then on the other side were people who were test site workers. And they were just screaming and yelling and, you know, just a very volatile situation. And the police, I guess it was the security at the time, came out on the road and started to spray water on the laying protesters. And it was so moving because once again it was this kind of unexpected picture. And then all the people who were out there for the protests, the peace protesters, were just kind of silently like watching. And the test site workers were just getting infuriated that the police were doing this little act of kindness for the—and I think it was showing—at the time Jim Merlino was the captain there and, you know, that was over a long period of time of cultivating understanding and a relationship with him that he conveyed to the police there. And so there was a relationship between—we had [00:50:00] more of a relationship cultivated between us and the police. And the test site workers, I don't think that I personally have ever really had a good, you know, kind of connection there. There were people from American Peace Test that were meeting regularly with some of the workers, some of kind of the organizers of that, but I don't have a lot of information on that.

*So essentially the workers were protesting, what they thought the protesters—*

Right. It was kind of confusing because they would call themselves the “pro-testers.”

*Right, the pro-testers. That’s very clever.*

So yes— you know, and of course that was their *jobs* and their—it was very threatening to them.

*And this was in the 1980s, late 1980s?*

Yes, late 1980s; 1988, 1989. And it was, I mean it probably felt very threatening to them because the numbers were growing.

*Of activists.*

Right, right, exactly. And you know, there were a few hundred people at that event there, and so they felt very threatened and exposed by that and so, you know, they would really—they would get pretty escalated at these events. And we used to do peacekeeping to just try to defuse—you know they had one occasion during a ritual, we were kind of walking and maybe laying something down and one of the pro-test site demonstrators had one of those plastic horns, you know, and he was like shouting in the face of a Buddhist monk out there. And the police captain Merlino came and he said, *If you do that one more time, I’m going to arrest you.* You know, it’s like a whole reversal. It was so intense. But I think, and I’m not sure of this, but I do think that the folks from American Peace Test who were meeting—I mean I remember that they were meeting with this woman and I don’t know who else, I think that that might have had an influence in the fact that they kind of died out after a while, you know, they stopped coming after a while. American Peace Test were the organizers of a lot of the—

*Right.*

And so I think members of that group who were meeting with the test site worker who came to these demonstrations, who organized these demonstrations, and actually kind of cultivated a

relationship with them, I always thought that that was part of the reason why they stopped coming to the test site and doing those actions. Because my sense was that they began to develop a human relationship. It's an assumption on my part but I know that it happened, that they would be—

*Well yes, and I think, sort of going back to what you said earlier, and something that Rosemary Lynch had said when I talked to her, was that, you know, you're all in this together, and it's not necessarily one against the other, it's,—*

Right, and I think that that defuses a lot of situations because most, you know, issues, you have people automatically assuming well, there's this side and there's this side, and it's black and white and it's kind of—yes. And so now if you say, no, I want to hear what's your perspectives on this, it just like that defuses the whole need to—

*Communication.*

Yes.

*Sure. Because I imagine, the flip side to this, you know, is, from Las Vegas in particular, for a lot of people this was a job to support their families and—*

It was the only thing they know how to do, you know, it was—so.

*Right. And so I think that's interesting, the two sides to every story kind of thing. But it seems to me that that sometimes is maybe one of the fundamental differences [00:55:00] between, say, you know, a group that's just organized in town that's against nuclear testing in general, goes up to the test site for just a pretty quick, protest kind of action versus, you know, groups with a little bit more of a spirituality that have been doing sustained actions for the past twenty years or so.*

Yes. Perhaps.

*So it's interesting, and I've heard a lot about Jim Merlino, so it's interesting to hear your experiences with him. He's somebody who I would like to speak with too. So have things changed at the test site over the years, in your experience, particularly from the activities organized out there? It seems that it sort of ebbs and flows.*

You mean as far as the function of the test site or the policies around testing?

*I mean more along the lines of organized actions at the test site.*

Oh yes. Well yes, I think it has had an ebb and flow, particularly Nevada Desert Experience has been one of the main faith-based organizing events out there and they, you know, in terms of having staff and having funding and any kind of nonprofit goes, have had their periods of stronger, more organized events and less organized events, and I think presently they're really trying to build. After the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty it was difficult, and my husband and I were co-directing the Nevada Desert Experience for a while right at that period, and it was really difficult to keep the momentum of people coming out to the test site because a lot of people just all of a sudden felt, OK, it's over, the issue is over, you know, we've stopped testing, and it took a while, and it's still taking some time for people to understand that they're still building, testing weapons, and it's just that a lot of it's moved to a different form, huge mega computers, and so just the analogy being also that when the partial test ban treaty was won and it went underground, a lot of the resistance to above ground testing, you know, all that resistance kind of died away because they thought OK, now we've found this victory. And it took a number of years before people started to realize that below ground testing was going on and how significant that was. And so as far as change in terms of people coming out to the tests and organizing events, that has been one of the kind of stumbling blocks in the way, is that there's this kind of *illusion* that the issue is over; that we don't have testing because of the Comprehensive Test Ban

Treaty. It sounds like OK, testing is over. So like the phases of our social movement, the education part comes in now and, you know, a whole other phase of organizing. So yes, so I think that that's changed. [pause] And certainly the political climate—.

*I was going to ask you about that.*

You know I think that that changes things as well.

*Has the political atmosphere or just the atmosphere of a post-9/11 scenario had an impact?*

Yes. Now I haven't been to like organizing events recently in terms of having a pulse on what's going through people in the last few years. I'm not really organizing any major events so that I could get a feel for that. I'm imagining that that does have an effect on people's sense of maybe we need a sort of fear feeding into something here, kind of fear, but I'm also wondering if the [01:00:00] growing opposition to the war in Iraq and the policies of this administration are not going to mobilize people to do more resistance. And it'll be interesting to see who comes out in August, because August is really hard to get people to come out because it's hot. But it'd be interesting to see what kind of energy comes.

*Have there been any differences in actually being at the test site since—have they implemented any additional security measures or become more stringent on things, that you've noticed?*

Well, I haven't really noticed anything much.

*Maybe not an issue?*

I mean they probably have but it's nothing that we'd be aware of at this point.

*Right. OK. You also work with Pace e Bene as well, or are you just on the board of that?*

I'm on the board. I was part of the founding circle for *Pace e Bene*, and up until a year-and-a-half ago I was working—oh, I had been part of the animating group of the founding members and then a few years ago worked part-time as staff and did that for a while, and then I had to for

whatever reasons, had to kind of pull back as far as working for *Pace Bene* but continued to be part of their board, which is a minimal commitment at this point, the way it's structured. I don't have a lot of commitment there, you know, but continued to remain part of the extended community circle. And yes, so that's my *Pace e Bene*.

*OK. So yes, it seems like you're very involved in community, in certain aspects of—I mean you—* Yes. Like I said, I was part of like Rosemary, Father Louis, Alain, Peter Ediger, we were all kind of part of that circle, and Ken Butigan, and then it's grown over the years and there's a lot of people in the Bay Area that are drawn in, and most of them are staff, part-time staff, for *Pace e Bene*. And for me it's always been very dove-tailed; fit very much my work with the Catholic Worker and my living vision, because a lot of what I ended up doing was promoting this program "From Violence to Wholeness" and facilitating workshops with "From Violence to Holiness," and so even now though I'm officially not on staff of *Pace e Bene*, over the summer we're offering "From Violence to Wholeness" workshops for a summer program. So it's kind of less formally connected but there's just so much overlap in understanding of way of life and active nonviolence, so that's the way I've connected with *Pace Bene*. It's kind of part of you.

*Right. Right. I'm trying to [pause] I guess I'd like to go back for a point of clarification. The Catholic Worker and the Nevada Desert Experience, both things that you were involved—how do they fit together? I guess this is just a separate—.*

The Catholic Worker is a lay movement that started as a lay movement in the 1930s, OK?

Nevada Desert Experience: a number of people who *founded* Nevada Desert Experience had [01:05:00] been influenced by the Catholic Worker *movement*, not particularly the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, but the movement itself. Like Anne Symens-Bucher who's the Nevada Desert Experience founder, she lived at the New York [Catholic] Worker for I don't know how long.



The same with some of the early people who were involved. So there is this kind of overlapping philosophical, I think would say influence, in terms of just the story of people who started Nevada Desert Experience, and just there's a huge, let's see, what do I want to say, the Catholic Worker is like the Catholic left, or the Catholic, you know, radicalism. And so there's a number of expressions of that, you know, from Franciscanism is another; [it] certainly has representation with a vision that would be considered the Radical Gospels or—and so Nevada Desert Experience is, you know, broader than that; maybe more inclusive than that at this point, but has kind of come out of that story. But as organizations or, you know, as bodies, decision-making bodies, separate decision-making bodies. Some of the people who have been involved—I see it as circles overlapping circles. Overlapping circles. But definitely separate decision-making bodies, distinctive missions and visions.

**[01:07:55]** End Track 2, Disk 1.

[End of interview]