

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

Interview with
Corbin Harney
and Rosemary Lynch

August 4, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker and Mary Palevsky

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Interview recorded on audio and video tape

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

[Recording begins mid-sentence.]

Corbin Harney: —and the leaders are telling us what to do.

Rosemary Lynch: Whatever happened to “of the people, for the people, by the people”?
What happened?

Mary Palevsky: *OK, we'll start recording. And the reason I thought after Corbin agreed to come talk to us that I would ask Rosemary over [was] because when we all were having that lunch a few weeks ago, you were remembering how long you've known each other and how many things you've done together. So we were just hoping that you would talk a little bit to us about— I'm curious how you met each other. Did you meet each other at the [Nevada] test site or how did that happen?*

Corbin Harney: She was going that way and I was going that way [indicating direction].

Rosemary Lynch: I guess I was going into the test site, and the police were waiting for me, something like that.

Yes, I remember—well, to talk about—is it ready to start?

Yes, you can just go ahead.

OK. Well, to begin with, I had several episodes and epics in my life before I came to Nevada. I was born and grew up in Phoenix, Arizona when Phoenix was just a little town. And so it was

very much in the atmosphere of native people. So I grew up with Apache medicine baskets for a waste basket and beautiful pottery on the table and everything. So I had a sense of a culture that was not just my own culture.

I had the privilege of a good education. And eventually I was a teacher, and after that I spent some years working in Europe. And in connection with that job, I got a chance to travel around to many countries in the world, and to learn a few languages. So that I considered a great privilege.

And when that work was over, I came to Nevada, to Las Vegas to work in a little social justice center which was just being founded. And what did I discover? I was living on the rim of the Nevada Test Site. I had never heard about the Nevada Test Site. I had no idea that the United States government had been blowing up nuclear bombs out there, and I think I can say that at that time, 99.9 percent of the people in the country had *no* idea of what was happening out here on the land of the Western Shoshone.

Well, I first discovered it when I heard in that summer of 1977 that then-President Jimmy Carter was asking the Congress for some money to develop a neutron bomb, which would destroy people but leave buildings standing. And I just was so shocked by the thought of a bomb like that, when a friend who worked out at the test site said, *What's he asking Congress [for] money for to develop the bomb? We've already tested it out there. So I realized there was a big deception going on beside everything else.*

So that year, on Hiroshima Day, a little group of us banded together and we called ourselves Citizens Concerned about the Neutron Bomb. Well, the Citizens were about ten people. It wasn't any big, imposing group, but we thought that would sound like something. So we went out to the test site. We went out early, early in the morning, before six o'clock, before

the sun came up, and I will never forget that morning. At that time there were no fences, no barricades, nothing. You could go right up to where the workers went in, which is where we went. And we got out there before the sunrise, and I still can remember that morning, the sun coming up behind the mountain, making the whole desert and all the plants a beautiful golden color. I was so thrilled that I somehow knew that, for a long time in the foreseeable future, I would be connected in some way with that place.

So a few of us started going out early on the morning, when we would hear that they were going to perform a test out there. Now at that time the tests were being conducted underground because of the United States and the ex-Soviet Union had completed a Limited Test Ban Treaty [LTBT] which provided that the tests would go underground but there had been a lot of accidents—when the earth split open and the mushroom cloud came up anyway and contaminated all the land.

So we started going out there, whenever we would hear that there was going to be a test. And little by little, things got organized and so on. And in 1982, we decided, a little group of us, [00:05:00] to spend the whole of the season of Lent, which as you know is the six weeks preceding Easter, and it's in many Christian traditions a period of penance and purification. We said we should spend that whole period of Lent out there near the entrance to the test site as an act of penance and resistance. And we dedicated that time to our patron, Saint Francis [of Assisi], who also loved the earth and composed a beautiful canticle in honor of our Mother Earth and greeted all the creatures as sister and brother. So we felt united in this spirit of unity, a familyhood with all of the creation. And I have to say, that was a fantastic period in my life.

Before beginning, I had gone to see General Mahlon Gates who was the head of the test site and explained to him exactly what we were going to do, make friends with him, and what did

he do? He kindly provided the Porta-Potties for the group and brought fresh water for us every day. And that convinced me that ever—we were on the opposite side, we were protesting what he was doing, but he was a good man. And so more and more we began to see that there is goodness in human heart, no matter how distorted sometimes it all gets. So we kind of went out with our faith in the human family to continue.

And that year we had a beautiful vigil, and on Good Friday the first act of civil disobedience took place, which had been well-prepared for. A group entered into a zone of the test site where we weren't supposed to go. Like I say there were no barriers, no fences, no watchtower. All that came later. As we said it was all built in our honor. Anyway, it wasn't there at the time. And so we just went in.

And that was also a very interesting time. We made friends with the judge, Bill [William] Sullivan, who actually had tears in his eyes when he said, I would like to declare all of you innocent, but I have to follow the law, so he gave everybody three days in prison. Judge Sullivan just died a few days ago. I saw his death notice in the newspaper. He was a good man.

Well anyway, that's how this action began out at the Nevada Test Site. And my first contact with the Shoshone people came when one day when I was out there with just a handful of people, Bill Rosse came. I didn't know who he was. But he came up and he introduced himself and he said, We've been observing that you were coming here and we want to say that, you know, we understand and we're grateful now that other people are beginning to understand the problem and to express some resistance. So that was my first opportunity to learn a little bit about the Western Shoshone Nation. I became friends also with Pauline Esteves and later with Corbin, and so we felt a real community of spirit. And one of the nicest things that happened was that—and this was the idea of the Shoshone leaders,

that they would give us a passport to enter their land. I still have my passport signed—lifetime passport. Some got a limited-time passport, but Bill Rosse signed mine for my whole lifetime: I am privileged to enter the Shoshone land. And so that's one of my precious life documents, which I still have.

So that when we were arrested we would show the paper and say, I don't understand why you want to take us into custody. We're here with the permission of those whom we consider the lawful owners of this land, or the lawful custodians of this land, because they didn't want to say "owner," but here we have our paper, you know, signed by their leader. Well, of course, it didn't count, but even so, it was a statement. It was a statement of our belief.

Time went on and pretty soon some other people began to come. I remember the day that I first saw somebody out there whom I didn't know, because for a few years, it was just people that we knew here and there, a few students from the university, a couple of professors came out, and people that we had invited or that we knew. But it was so important to me that the movement was growing, the idea, the news was getting out, when the first group came that I did not recognize. So little by little, the resistance grew.

[00:10:00] And in the meantime the nuclear tests were continuing. And the United States and the ex-Soviet Union had signed a Limited Test Ban Treaty which decreed that, first of all, the tests had to be announced to the public beforehand, and secondly, that the tests would be conducted underground. Well, before even that was insisted upon, that the tests had to be announced to the public, we always knew when one took place. Klaryta [Antoszewska] and I were living together, and in our apartment the light fixtures would begin to shake. We said, oh, something's happening out at the Nevada Test Site. That's how—actually the earth shook many times because of the size of these bombs and the terrible repercussion of them. And like I say, a few times the desert

floor split open, the mushroom cloud came up and contaminated a lot of people. So all this was continually, you know, coming back to our consciousness.

Well, as the resistance grew and got a little bit more organized and different groups began coming, it was really very exciting for a time. It became kind of a focal point of the peace movement resistance in the country, I would say. For a while it had been back East or some other places, but the Nevada Test Site really became a focal point for national resistance.

Suzanne Becker: *That was like in the early eighties or so?*

Yeah, it was in the maybe early eighties, you could say, mid-eighties. Mid-eighties maybe, early nineties even. And scientists came and well-known names came and groups came and organized. The [American] Peace Test group came, and some of them had a little bit of money that they got from foundations. We never had anything like that because we were just small groups going out there, so we didn't have any big organization that was getting grants or anything, but some groups began to come like that. And so prominent people began to come and a lot of attention began to be focused on the Nevada Test Site.

This continued and the arrests continued; and at one time the number of people arrested exceeded the capacity of all the jails in the state, so you can see how it like snowballed.

Well, for a while the attention kind of shifted away from the Nevada Test Site. Personally I got involved in other activities also. I had the privilege of being invited to Europe several times to give lectures and talks. That took up a lot of my time. I had the privilege of traveling to many countries and seeing many things that shocked me, like seeing these pictures of the starvation in Africa remind me of my trip to Africa when I saw much of the same thing, even in those years, many years ago. I saw displaced people all over, transmigration camps as they called [them], and people being taken from one place to the other. So all these tragedies kind of built up in me.

And at a certain point, two Franciscans priests, Alain Richard and Louis Vitale, asked me if I would join them in founding a sort of a group that would look at some of the motivation of these nuclear tests. We said we'd been protesting, we'd been holding vigils, we've had fasts, we've had prison sentences, all these things, and the bombs are going off like always. Do we need to see what's causing those bombs that are going off in our hearts? That's what's causing the bombs to go off out there. So we decided that we would try to do some research on the whole subject of human violence as it related especially to our situation here, the violence of one people against another, the violence toward native peoples, the violence toward Mother Earth. And of course being Franciscans, we had the same love for the Mother Earth [as] our patron, Saint Francis, you know, that was part of our heritage.

So that's how we started this nonviolence group which we also dedicated to our patron, Saint Francis, and we called it *Pace e Bene*, which is Italian for "peace and good." That was the greeting he gave to the people whom he met. Of course he's a saint out of the Middle Ages. So we took that, and that group is still going on and trying its best to be look at the roots of violence [00:15:00] in the human heart, the roots of violence in the U.S. culture, in this consumeristic society that we have that is so filled with violence. I think it's pretty safe to say that in countries that we consider, let me say, civilized, we have by *far* the greatest number of murders, of other, you know, personal tragedies that happen. Sometimes they publish the statistics and it's appalling, the number of murders we have per capita in comparison with any other country. So there is this terrible violence that's existing inside of our society, and I think we do have to be conscious of that, and one expression of that was of course in our history, the historical taking-over of the lands of native peoples, the decimation, massacres of native peoples, and so on.

So when we say Nevada Test Site and we look at this, we're really talking about a whole panorama of interlocking facts, interlocking tragedies, interlocking histories, and so on. And I think it's not any less today. Now, at this time, the resistance groups have become very organized and they plan programs and so on. Everything has its evolution. So that was maybe an evolution that had to take place.

But I go back to the earlier days when things were very simple and when we tried to express our solidarity with the Shoshone Nation and understand what was happening, which was a crime against them and a crime against the Mother Earth.

So that's just a little summary of some of my experiences at the test site. I don't know if you have any questions.

Mary Palevsky: *You've really probably answered this but it was something I had thought of when I knew you were coming over, so I'll ask it and then see if it stimulates anything else. When we got together a few weeks ago, you had been over to the [Atomic Testing] museum and you, Rosemary, said it's not the complete story. You've already said this but I wanted to ask you the question anyway: How would you go about telling that story in a different way or a more complete way? Because I was struck by the fact that you didn't say it's the wrong story. You just said it's not the whole story.*

It's not the whole story. They document in kind of a sense of glory and achievement, the explosion of these terrible bombs, for example, in the Pacific, the bomb that blew away whole Pacific islands and things like that. And it sounded like everybody was just so full of enthusiasm. This is was a great new page turned in history when we could do this, and we've defeated that evil empire over there. But all over the country, there were resistance groups. Our group, when we first began, called ourselves the Sagebrush Alliance, because there were alliances springing

up. In the East there was the Clamshell Alliance and someplace else there was a Desert Alliance and all these things, so we just called ourselves that alliance in solidarity with the other groups. Then there were several western groups that came together and we all called ourselves the Cactus Alliance to show that there were groups in four or five states that were all resisting military installations in their particular locality. And you know it was out of that general spirit of resistance, which really existed all over the country, to the idea of the nuclear weapons that motivated us a lot. We felt, oh, we're not alone, sitting out here in the desert. There are people in other places. But I think a very successful propaganda job was done on the American people, you know, "the bomb saved us." Even when we visited that little museum, the young attendant said, Well, if we hadn't had the bomb, that saved us, Russia would be over here, would've bombed us. We have no way of knowing for sure what a different pathway history could have taken. I am convinced we could have had a completely different history. Had we really put the energy, had we really had the best minds in the country, the best and noblest spirits, and there were many in the country who were resisting the nuclear bomb, and had they had more influence, I think we could have a different history. What are we doing now in Iraq, a country that didn't do anything to us? We're sending these young soldiers over there to kill people that have nothing to do with anything. Greed, power, we [00:20:00] would like to be the supreme power in the whole world, control the world's oil supply which is a symbol of power and the promotion of riches. We have to be truthful about this. This has nothing to do with any kind of idealism and I feel very bad about the delusion which is happening to many people in the country over this Iraq war. It will end badly. The same thing in Afghanistan. In the very early days of that war, they showed one image on television of these young soldiers in their military uniform digging the trench for the pipeline, the oil pipeline that was going to go from [the Republic of] Uzbekistan down to the Caspian Sea. But whoops! That was suppressed

immediately. We were there for some other altruistic motive. Nobody has yet figured it out, but anyway. Oh, the Taliban. I just remembered. But they were digging this pipeline. And the same thing, you know, if we have these delusions of the empire, it will end like every empire that has ever existed in history. And I know those are maybe dangerous words to say, but we do have to be truthful. We do have to look at this history and we do have to see what exactly is happening with this country that we love. I love this country very much. I've traveled in many, many countries, and I love some of them, too, but I really love this country for what it could be, for what it could represent. There was a time when this country was respected. It is not respected anymore. In recent travels, it's looked upon as an oppressor nation, an aggressor nation. The sympathies of the world are not with us. We have to understand that.

So these things are all connected some way with the tragedy of the Nevada Test Site, which was a great acceleration in the arms race. If you look at statistics and graphs that came out during those years, seventies, eighties, early nineties, the acceleration of the arms race and each new leap—we often like to say we have to do it to answer what was then the Soviet Union, but most of the time they were doing something to answer us. We generally took the next leap before they did. So, you know, that answer didn't ring very true. So while there were many sites around the country where there were military installations and where there was a lot of resistance going on, I think the focal point was the Nevada Test Site. Without that, without the robbing of that land and the use of it, as well as some of the islands, for these terrible experiments, I think that the war machine would not have continued the way it did. And the fact that when we signed these various treaties, we always found some little way to get around things so we could more or less continue what we had in mind anyway.

So I'm speaking as a person who loves this country very, very much for what it could be and what it could mean. And if I have any strength to resist the wrongs and the bitterness and the calamities and the crimes of war, I really would like to do that.

Mary Palevsky: *Well, I had another question but I'm taking in what you said, Rosemary, so I'm just going to be quiet for a minute while I think about what you said.*

Corbin Harney: Well, if nobody wants to ask questions—well, you know, the American Peace Test was the head of the whole thing at one time. So they fold up. When they fold up, I thought to myself, you know, I talked to a few of the people that's been associated with what I'm doing, and I asked everybody, what do you guys think that we should name this? [We named it] as a Shundahai Network and under Shoshone, so the Shoshone would really get up in arms and come out here and put a stop to this. Because under the treaty [Ruby Valley, 1863] that they signed, I thought. That's when I took over at that time. [00:25:00] We called it a Shundahai Network. We held it for many years. And then I didn't know what I was doing either but at the same time I was relying on the people because I always thought the people would really understand, especially my own people would really understand that we're trying to put a stop to this testing at the Nevada Test Site. But somehow it didn't work out like I figured. But some of the people like her, [Rosemary Lynch] for one, keep coming and keep coming and saying we're going to have to do something. So I kept saying I don't know how we're going to do this. Then I started ordering my people what we should do. And as I remember, I think you guys got tape on all of this stuff that we're trying to do, what we can, put a tripod out there in the middle of the road, and then the young girl got hurt because the wind took that pipe that we had out there; the wind came up and then that threw her off of that—

Mary Palevsky: *I don't know that story. What happened there?*

The wind took that pipe. We had them—the rancher used for irrigating their land, the aluminum pipes, we had three of them, put them together and put her up on top of that. But somehow we [were] too busy doing something else. The wind came up and took that, one of the legs skidded off of the pavement, and she got hurt. That happened one time.

So that was—I guess they asked me, *Can we do this?* And then I said yeah. We had a tipi out there, as I remember, and I think that the DOE [Department of Energy] wanted to do away with it. Long as Bill Rosse or myself was there, they never come around. The sheriff don't come around or nothing. But if we're not there then they bother them people, saying, *well, we're going to do away with it.* I remember Norm—maybe you guys know Norm. He passed on not too long ago. He used to have a camp out there and stayed there year round. And they keep telling him they're going to have to do away with that camp. And then when we're not there, they took a front-end loader and moved everything away from there. So when we're there, when one of us was there, they don't do nothing. They don't even come out there.

Then another time I ordered the young girls, I said, *You guys get yourself organized.* I said, *When the bus come in from Las Vegas, we'll put a stop to that bus and then you guys jump underneath it, chain yourself underneath the bus.* So everybody watched what we were doing. It's organized as it can be. But their security was around the bus when it was coming, all right, but there was four young girls out there who had run to the—all the reporters from throughout the world that came on that bus that time. That's the reason why we say, maybe you'll remember. It's in the history, in the books. That one they did put a stop [to] that bus. When the bus stopped the girls jumped underneath it, they already had the handcuffs tied to their wrists. All they had to do was chain to whatever they can find, put the other cuff on. And they couldn't ever get them out. And that one girl got hurt. Maybe you

remember that. What's her name? The one who run over her foot. Maybe you remember that.

What was her name?

Rosemary Lynch: Yes, I remember there was an episode.

Corbin Harney: But run over her foot at that time. So those are the things [that] happened.

Then another time I ordered people to, instead of doing it at the Nevada Test Site, let's go out to Nye County. We go out there on Nye County and stop the whole system, the [00:30:00]

highway. Maybe some of you guys remember that. We held that road for both direction[s]. For six miles both ways the traffic was stopped. Of course, that was—then when the FBI's or

whatever came to me, when they told me, You're the head of this [00:30:23]

Shundahai Network. We're going to take you to jail, I said, Go ahead. I want to know for sure what that paper reads. When you guys said "treaty," you made a treaty with us. I want to know what this is all about. But, you know.

And then this one truck had nuclear waste on it, coming in. They put a stop to it. Then I was talking to him and then everybody was saying, Get away from it. Get away from it. And I told him, By God, Why don't you pull that truck off to the side of the road here?

And then the highway patrolman rushed all the way from around the corner of that at the Nye County line, rushed over there with the red light on and told me, You get off the road.

And I said, Why don't you tell *him* to get off the road? I'm not dangerous. *He's* the guy that's dangerous. You're supposed to be protecting the public. What are you doing?

He didn't say anything. All he did was look at his shoes. And we talked for about twenty minutes, I guess. Mateo [Ferreira] and I was there, taking pictures of it. I got pictures of all of that. So do they.

I think you remember that time. Maybe you guys remember when I told everybody I was going to cut the fence [and] invite everybody onto my land, and told the DOE, the FBI, and—not FBI but, you know, county sheriff and so forth, I said, Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock I'm going to cut that fence and invite people onto my land. And I went out there, and I got pictures out there. I think you guys seen them pictures of it. I don't see it in the museum but—

Rosemary Lynch: I was there when you cut the fence. That's where the barbed wire—we had to step over, too.

Corbin Harney: Yeah, we cut the fence and then invited everybody in there with us. The next time we came over there, there was a whole bunch of dirt over it, and then we took a shovel and shoveled it off and made a road out of that.

So those [are] things that I have done, but they don't have no record of it, but they do have a record for their own. They took [a] picture of me where that standing up sideways or whichever direction. But I told Raynard [**spelling and last name?**]the same thing over here when Raynard and Susie [**last name?**] sat on top of the federal court building, and we put them up there on the canopy on the federal court building, and they chained theirselves there with their ladders and whatnot. Took the Fire Department three hours to get them off of that. The sheriff told me, he said, You'd better get them guys off of this immediately or I'm going to take you to jail. And I said, Go ahead. That's what I like to know. I said, That's a federal court building. I'm a federal. I said, By God, according to your paper, I'm a federal. I'm controlled by you guys. You're supposed to be protecting my land. What are you guys doing? They talked to us for about twenty minutes and then he left. Well, I'm with you, boys, he said. I haven't seen him again.

On that time, remember, you know, at the Highway Department and the sheriff, the highway patrolman give twenty-six people citations, told them by God they had to pay. They had to pay, I don't know, three-hundred-and-something dollars at that time. Maybe you remember, some of you guys remember.

But anyway, during the hearing, the judge told the crowd, You people, twenty-six of them, I'm not going to give you sentences at all. I'm going to tell you, you better go out there and work with Shundahai Network for forty hours, each one of you guys. That's in there, you know, that's on the paper. I got the paper on all of that.

Rosemary Lynch: Well, I remember [Nye County] Sheriff Jim Merlino became our good friend. And one time we were out there, I believe it was a Good Friday, and there was just a handful of people, maybe seven or eight standing. And so he came along. He was standing in line with us, told me he was our friend, and he's saying, You know, we don't have very many on the line today. [And we were saying], No, we don't. So the buses were all going by and the [00:35:00] sheriff is standing right beside us with our signs. So we had many good relationships, anyway, that resulted from it.

And I remember one time, we decided—it was Easter Sunday—that we would make a blockade. And so we went out there, the little group. We went over the forbidden line and we went down about a mile, and then we just stayed there in the middle of the road, not realizing that maybe they wouldn't care on Easter Sunday. So after a while—the police came for a while, and then one of the officers came up and he says, You know, it's Easter Sunday. We all want to go home and have our Easter dinner with our family. You can stay out here as long as you want. He said, Nothing will happen. I mean we were totally harmless. We couldn't blow up the test site, which we never wanted to. We had our code of nonviolence. So that didn't have a lot of effect on them. We thought, this'll show them, Easter

Sunday, we're willing to come out here and stand out here even on this day. So it didn't work very well.

But we had many nice relationships with guards. We used to stand out there when the buses—at one period there were eleven thousand people working out there, including those in the offices here and out on the test site. And one bus stopped and this guy got off. And there's just maybe a half-a-dozen of us standing on the road with our sign. He had bought one of those big boxes of fresh doughnuts for us. And he said, *Every day we see you standing out here so early in the morning. You had to get out there very early because the buses started going by at six o'clock. So he bought us this big box of doughnuts. I mean stories like that on the human level. There were so many. But we really appreciated—*

Corbin Harney: I don't know whether you two were involved in that time when they dumped us at Tonopah and told all of us—forty-seven buses took us over there. Forty-seven of them.

Suzanne Becker: *They just took you guys up to Tonopah?*

Up to Tonopah.

And left you?

It was supposed to be we're going to jail over there, instead of where the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] office is now, just going over the hill, you see the Tonopah town, they dumped us off over there. People had lost their cameras, their rings, whatnot. They made us put everything together in a plastic bag, and they throwed it out there like it was. Everybody was trying to find what belonged to them. Eleven of them buses took us over there that time. I don't know where the—

Rosemary Lynch: We had to find our own ride home. We had to call somebody to come and pick us up.

Corbin Harney: Yes. And then another time they took us to Beatty, I don't know, three buses, I think, took us to Beatty. And I was so busy loading everybody up to come back to the test site, and I realized I got left there by myself. I didn't know. There was nobody around there, you know, where the school is.

And then Merlino came along and he said, What are you doing?

I said, I got left right here.

Well, get in, he said, and we'll take you back.

Rosemary Lynch: He was a good man, Jim Merlino.

Corbin Harney: He was a good man.

Suzanne Becker: *Yes, it sounds like you had a pretty good relationship with him.*

Rosemary Lynch: We did.

Corbin Harney: Then I used their office, I don't know, several different times. He told me, Go in there and call, if you want to call. But I didn't have no doughnuts or coffee with him but, you know.

But I've done foolish things in my time, but they never did take me to jail, never have. I asked them to but they never have. But that made me feel proud of myself when a judge told me, he said, They're going to work for you for forty hours, them twenty-six people. He said, Whenever you decide that they have done their forty-hour job for you, then you bring all the papers back here to me. So I did.

Rosemary Lynch: That was judge Bill Sullivan?

Corbin Harney: And then I was proud of myself at that time—you know. I think that things can be busy, like you guys are always saying. But you guys are doing good things, keep on, because this is your land. Makes you think you have to.

Rosemary Lynch: Klaryta [Antoszezwska] was arrested, too, at the test site, and I always felt it was dangerous for her because she wasn't born in this country. And I was always afraid, maybe they could've done something to her, but she had the courage to go out there and do it.

Suzanne Becker: *Did you ever face any—it sounds like, your relations throughout the year have [00:40:00] been pretty, I don't know if "peaceful" is the right word, like with Merlino and the other folks that work out there. Did you ever have any oppositional times? Was there ever any—*

Corbin Harney: Right from the beginning, yeah. We had a lot of it because the people from, I don't know what they call it, they were trained to be security for the test site throughout the country.

Suzanne Becker: *Security guards?*

They were really bad there, you know. I know Norm got beat up by one of them once before, broke his ribs and kicked him and this and that. They had a little, I don't know what kind of cart they use, they run around out there with it inside their fence, with guns and everything else.

There were always two of them in that little, I don't know what they call it, some kind of carts that they use that are open. Always two. The guy on the opposite side always carried a shotgun, and they're ready to use it. But it was bad. It was really bad there for a little way.

Rosemary Lynch: I have to say I never had personally any bad experiences because maybe being a woman, maybe because they knew me or something, I don't know. But they did always escort you with guns. Absolutely. And they put the handcuffs on, you know, and I have very

narrow wrists. And one time they put the handcuffs on, I go like this [shaking head], they fall off.

[Laughter] They couldn't find a pair that was small enough. And I said OK at the last, I said,

Put them on. I'll go like this. [moving wrists] So many crazy, funny things happened.

Corbin Harney: Some people, they put it on there so tight that they, you know, it stops their blood.

Rosemary Lynch: Yes, it depended, if you had a mean guy. For the most part, our groups that we took, we insisted that they took the nonviolence training before. There were some other groups that went out that were also a little bit antagonistic toward the police and the guards, and so they reacted that way. But I have to say, the groups that came out with us, with this whole Franciscan spirit kind of thing, and the Nevada Desert Experience [NDE] that was kind of grounded in that, we didn't have the bad experiences because we looked upon the police as victims the same way we were. We said the bomb, if it comes down, is going to hit them like it's going to hit us. It was like they're in danger, too. And that's their job, you know, they—for some of them. I know this one black guy said, Look, I hate to arrest any of your people, but this is the first decent job I ever had in my life. I've got to do it. And I thought, well, I had some understanding for him.

Corbin Harney: They used to drag people, taking them over there to the pen, you know. If you don't want to go, they drag you.

Rosemary Lynch: But we, for our groups, we asked nobody to go limp. We said, Don't do that. Then you invite violence. They have to take you. So we said, If you choose to commit the civil disobedience, you walk in. It was your choice. And don't put the violence on them. So we kind of had this nonviolence training beforehand, so we didn't have any of those bad episodes. But when the resistance grew and some other groups came and they didn't bother kind of with that code of nonviolence, then those things that

Corbin is describing did happen. But in a sense, they lacked the preparation that they needed to undertake an action off that. And a few here and there that didn't have any nonviolence training would taunt the guards a little bit, you know, throw insults and, you know, why don't you quit your job? and all this sort of thing.

Suzanne Becker: *So they were oppositional and antagonistic, as you said.*

Yes, they became confrontational themselves. So there were some episodes just like he's describing. But we tried to get to the human level. Now they have kids that are going to be damaged by the bomb and they don't want to eat contaminated food, contaminated water and everything. So we felt like we're all kind of on the same side here.

Suzanne Becker: *I think that's very interesting. I mean an approach that is—you don't—I ask you because you don't—every time I've talked to you, you've talked about, you had a fairly good relationship, and you don't ever read about that, you don't hear about that much. I learned about it from talking to you and from talking to other people that were involved with the Nevada Desert Experience, but that's not the whole story that they tell about it.*

Rosemary Lynch: I know a few times we had representatives of groups from other parts of the country that came [00:45:00] out and said, You know, we've read about your resistance and your friendship with the guards and the police. How do you do it? So we said, Well, you know, one, two, three, these are the things we try to agree to. So it was a great page in my life's storybook.

Corbin Harney: I know I violated their law a lot of different ways but they never could take me in front of the judge. I remember we blockade all the road that's going to the test site one time, and then they have to come clear around on the other side to where the power line was in order to bring the workers in. And we couldn't let them come out either. Violated their rules and regulations thinking they're going to take me to jail, then I'm going to tell the judge, Tell

me the truth. Where is your paper saying that you own the land? But they never could. That was always my thing. I think that's the reason why they could never take me to jail, because I'm always asking that question. And they know that I violated the rules and regulations, when I went overseas[s] bringing the people in, same thing. When they were there in that part of the country, like in Germany and Russia, Kazakhstan, they all know that, you know, I got the whole film on all of those things that we got done, but I have never showed it around because I didn't want people to have a wrong idea about a lot of different things. But I'd like to show it someday, somewhere, just to a group, what film that I have taken and so forth.

Mary Palevsky: *That would be great to see.*

Corbin Harney: But I'm violating the law, you know.

Mary Palevsky: *Oh, I see what you're saying. You were violating the law in what way when you were overseas?*

Corbin Harney: Because you cannot, you know, you can't stop a highway from going either way. That's the law. And you cannot stop a government going into their workshop, into another one, you know. I can't put a stop to it and order some people to take their life under their own hand, tie themselves under the bus. That's against the law. And there are a lot of things I've done, but they never could take me. Because I was crazy enough to do what I was told to do.

Mary Palevsky: *I wanted to ask you about the—since I've been here, this Mother's Day event that you have? Is that a yearly event that you have at the test site? Around Mother's Day? How did that come about?*

Corbin Harney: Well, the first time we were doing it on different days, like Egg [Easter] Day, for one, from the beginning of it, you know, what they call that Egg Day for, you know. I don't remember now. But then I've been saying, I said, A Mother's Day, that's our

Mother we're protecting. That's when we should be going out there, you know, instead of that Egg Day or whatever they call it. Easter Sunday? And I said, Let's invite the young people out there for that Easter Sunday. Let's change it to Mother's Day, so we're protecting the Mother, in other words. They took our statue, the Mother statue, away from us. They kept it in the yard over there for one year.

Rosemary Lynch: Yeah, I remember—

Corbin Harney: A year-and-a-half—

You had a statue?

Rosemary Lynch: We had a statue, and we had a cross for a while, too. They both disappeared. And we had the Shadow Children. That was beautiful. We had a sculpture made, this image of two children, and they were called the Shadow Children, and we had a ceremony installing them kind of up on the mountain near the test site. And I don't know whether the elements deteriorated them or what, but after a while we couldn't find them again. But that was beautiful, the Shadow Children. They represented the children victims of the bomb.

Yes, we had many things like that. And the whole organization of radiation victims, we [00:50:00] had a lot of connection with the victims from Utah, the Downwinders, they came, and they had their organization. And then we organized the test site, Nevada Test Site Workers Radiation Victims Association, and some of them, we helped them get back to Washington, D.C. to represent their cause. They got small compensation, not anything very much. But they had been lied to about the dangers and were out there when the above-ground tests took place. Then there were the military, the soldiers. Klaryta [Antoszewska] has pictures that she managed to get, very interesting ones. She has a very good photographic record of everything because she's a wonderful photographer.

Suzanne Becker: *That would be great to see.*

Rosemary Lynch: Maybe someday she'll come over and she'll show you.

Suzanne Becker: *And so you've got another event organized this year for Mother's Day as well?*

Corbin Harney: For Mother's Day that's coming up [in the] spring. So we're going to talk about it in San Francisco and try to get the people to understand why we're—try to get more people involved in it, because there were more people involved in it once before, in '88 for one. You know, there were eleven thousand people at the Nevada Test Site at one time. But nuclear energy department [DOE] told them, the world, in other words, we're not going to test no more at the Nevada Test Site. That's what they said. Then everybody thought they quit, and so they didn't show up. But they continuously test secretly. Now we don't even hear when they're going to—they used to let people know when they're going to test or what day they're going to test and so forth. Now they don't say *nothing* anymore to nobody.

Rosemary Lynch: They had to do that because that was part of the treaty with the ex-Soviet Union. They had to announce. But now they, like Corbin is saying, there's what they call subcritical tests. They said that's not covered by the treaty, so they're doing that. We don't have any idea of the extent of it, really how much they're doing or what—we should probably try through the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA]. A few times I've got things. It wasn't a great help. I asked for my own file once and they sent me a bunch of stuff, but everything was all blacked out. So what I could ever even do with it—

Suzanne Becker: *Can't even see what you're doing. That's interesting. So I mean I think it's interesting people think that there has been a ban now on testing, and you've mentioned several times that it's not really so and that maybe we're just testing different things now and they don't even have to tell us.*

Rosemary Lynch: I think they're doing what they want to do, and it was safe for them to put this test ban because they didn't have any intention of exploding the bombs in that way anymore anyhow, so now they have other ways, this subcritical stuff and everything. I mean you have to be a real scientist to understand it. But they're continuing with that, and they're developing weapons that are so horrendous that we don't even imagine.

Suzanne Becker: *So has this changed the way that either of you approach the test site or approach your work out there, or is still the same? Because you mentioned that really in the eighties and even into the nineties, it was so big, there were so many people out there, but now it seems to have died down. How do you keep this going?*

Corbin Harney: Well, I don't think it died down. I think they're just doing that secretly, that they, you know. So right today we all know there's that waste coming all the time. There's waste coming in from the California side on Highway 27. There's two trucks comes in early in the morning, every morning. That's the reason why that one guy got caught over there in Shoshone [California] here, what, three, four years ago? No, three years ago, I guess. He was a driver. That time, that was on Sunday, I believe it was, Saturday, they had a meeting over there in Tecopa [California] about the nuclear, and this old man was there, and then he was having [00:55:00] coffee at the Shoshone Café that morning. This truck stopped there and then he seen something leaking out of this truck. I think it was in the paper. And then he called the sheriff. At that time the deputy sheriff used to be stationed at Shoshone. So he came over and got the DOE to come over there and look at that. All they did was just wash that where the leak on the ground was. So it was on the news at that time. But there is a truck, two trucks come in Monday morning and Wednesday and sometimes on Saturday, the waste truck going to Beatty, and we put a stop to that, too, once before, in Beatty. We went up there and tried to put a stop to that waste coming

in. Now the reason at that time, I've been told by one of the officials, The reason why we're doing this, we control the land for you. We're saving the life on this Mother Earth. They told me, We're saving the Mother Earth for all of us to enjoy. That's the reason why we want to put it in there. But we got the control over your land. We've been told that in Washington, D.C. The last time when we was there the judge told us, You guys better go back to your own state and you get your senator to introduce a bill in the Congress.

But nobody wants to do anything. The only ones doing it right now is [Senator Harry] Reid who wanted to push that money upon us, that hundred-and-forty-six million dollars. OK, where does it come in? I ask that question many times. If we didn't own the land, how come they want to pay us a hundred-and-forty-six million dollars? They say, You guys don't own it. We paid you off a long time ago. Where is that piece of paper that we signed? They don't show us that. And that's what we as a native people are fighting about today.

Now it's getting worse. It's getting bad. Something that you people don't know a thing about. It's casinos throughout the country that's dividing us more. The money is dividing us more.

I know that they're watching what I'm doing all the time but, I really, like I said, I don't care. They know that I'm a dummy. I don't have no education. I never went to school. They know that. They got my history written down. But I'm free to talk and I think that's really what they're afraid of. Because I'm not afraid to hold anything back. I think that's the reason why. I don't know.

Rosemary Lynch: They've never been in your wise presence, Corbin, if they dare to say anything like that. There are a lot of lessons that people don't learn in books.

Mary Palevsky: *We're just at the very end of this tape, so—*

- Corbin Harney:** Can we turn it off, then?
- Rosemary Lynch:** Thank you for your interest.
- Corbin Harney:** OK. Can I go home with that machine? Then I can look at it.
- Mary Palevsky:** *But maybe we can come visit you with the machine.*
- Corbin Harney:** Yeah.
- Suzanne Becker:** *Yeah, that would be great.*
- Mary Palevsky:** *That would be really nice.*
- Suzanne Becker:** *Thank you so much.*
- Mary Palevsky:** *Oh, this was a long haul. Thank you so much for indulging us. It was really wonderful. I learned a lot.*
- Corbin Harney:** Well, there is a lot of things that we know but we're not covering everything.
- Mary Palevsky:** *We can't in two hours.*
- Corbin Harney:** It can't be covered. It takes a long time.
- Suzanne Becker:** *Well, we'd love to come back and talk to you more.*
- Rosemary Lynch:** You can't even cover the resistance. Only the highlights.
- [00:59:33] End Track 2, Disc 1.
- [00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 1.
- [00:00:46] End Track 3, Disc 1.
- [End of interview]