

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

**Interview with**  
**Patricia George and**  
**Virginia Sanchez**

**September 11, 2004**  
**Ely, Nevada**

Interview Conducted By  
Mary Palevsky

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Produced by:

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## Interview with Patricia George and Virginia Sanchez

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

*[Opening question about how Ms. George and Ms. Sanchez began their work with Nuclear Risk Management for Native Communities (NRMNC).*

**Patricia George:** I began with the project in August of 1996, I believe; I was invited to apply at that time. They were advertising for a community trainer and researcher and I had some previous experience working with my tribal community, so it was something that I wanted to do; to work with more communities.

My first day on the job, I was sent with Virginia [to Montana] to an environmental justice conference; that was quite an experience right off the bat.

**Mary Palevsky:** *You know what I meant to do? I meant to start actually with where you were from and everything and I forgot. So let's go back to that.*

**Patricia George:** I'm originally from this area. My family came from the Duckwater Shoshone Reservation. We probably moved there, I believe, over twenty-five years ago.

*What year were you born?*

**Patricia George:** I was born in 1969 and I've lived there all of my life.

*So now we can hop back over. Had you been to North Dakota [Montana] before this conference?*

**Patricia George:** Montana. No, I'd never been to Montana; it was quite an experience.

*What was the ad looking for, when you saw this, for this project?*

**Patricia George:** Particularly, a Native person to work with communities and to gather information.

*Were you at that point—I'm so ignorant of this whole story that I'm hoping to learn from you—were you, in the area generally as a younger person, aware of the atmospheric testing that had gone on and things like that? Because you were born after it was pretty much over.*

**Patricia George:** No. My family grew up with the fallout and worked all of them, in the fifties and sixties. My grandparents and my mother and her sibling were raised on the reservation.

*Because I saw, when I was reading Mr. [Bennie] Reilley's transcript, that your granddad, I guess, remembered some of the testing, is that right? I had written down Jack George.*

**Patricia George:** That's my mother's father.

*So he remembered seeing some of the atmospheric testing?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*Now is he still alive?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*So were you sort of aware of this in your everyday growing up life, was it something that you knew had happened?*

**Patricia George:** Not at all; not until I got the job and learned more. The research went on and looking back on my family, how they lived out there and how they were raised and everything that they came in contact with and the lifestyle, it was just was a realization.

*That's interesting. So when you first were working there, what kinds of things did they train you to do? You're working with these scientists and professors from Clark [University], is that right?*

**Patricia George:** Yes, I received training from them to be able to go out into my community and educate, and help to research the information we needed; Especially collecting data.

*One of the things that interested me when I was reading your articles was this whole issue of the fact that the Native people were not included in some of these studies that the Department of Energy [DOE] actually did. Bruce Church is quoted in a lot of those articles as saying—and we interviewed Bruce Church actually, but I haven't read that piece that you guys refer to where, for whatever reason, Native people weren't involved. What's your sort of take on why that was the case?*

**Patricia George:** Well, DeeDee [Virginia Sanchez] might want to help me on that.

*You want to jump in on that, Virginia?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It was probably the dose reconstruction study. I think we were somewhat insignificant. Bruce Church will tell you, Yes, we were considered and that we were [00:05:00] under the “shepherd” lifestyle—there were several lifestyles—but my guess is we were insignificant. And I don't know that Native people were thought of thoroughly in how we lived or how we thought; just as the Nevada Test Site was set up in an area where there was a small population. From what I understand, too, the dose reconstruction study was completed after Joseph Lyon and other doctors began to do the research which then led to the lawsuit. Once all the medical research was tied to the cancers with the Iodine 131 and plutonium with the leukemias, DOE now—I think it was DOE that did the dose reconstruction study—had to answer in some way. And I really do believe that the Native people were insignificant in all of this.

*You know, when I first arrived, I was talking to a woman who was doing an oral history, not connected with mine through another organization, of these community environmental monitoring programs, CEMP, and one of her questions on her questionnaire was, why were there no Native people that were these community environmental monitors? And so that sort of connects in my mind with this question of why that didn't occur. I guess one of the articles you*

*all have says that some questionnaires went out, a couple of phone calls , but your view is that you just weren't considered. [See: Frohmborg, Goble, Sanchez and Quigley. "The Assessment of Radiation Exposures in Native American Communities." Risk Analysis, v20 n1]*

**Virginia Sanchez:** As monitors. I know that a relative by the name of Doug George, Sr., who just passed away last year, worked at a station along Highway 6 and wrote a letter asking, why is my hair falling out? They had a dosimeter on the building that went all the way to the extreme, and when he and others began to question the DOE came in and took that off the building.

*Where was this?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It was right near Duckwater; off Highway 6 about eight miles from the turnoff to Duckwater and State Route 379.

*Do you have any sense of what era that was in?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** We can probably find the letter; we have a copy. It was during the atomic testing. I'd have to go back through my files and find it; I might be able to find it for you tonight. I brought all these old files with me. [See correspondence provided by Virginia Sanchez, February 17 and 18, 1971, subject "Duckwater meeting – Baneberry"]

*Oh, did you? That would be interesting.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Just talking with him, he said they didn't receive any answers.

*Now that you've begun [Virginia], why don't we step back a little bit with you, too. Tell me where you were born and little bit about your background and how you came to be involved in this project.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** I was born in 1954 and grew up in Carson City; well, I grew up in Stewart, three miles from Carson City. My father worked for the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] as a road

foreman. I moved to Duckwater in 1983 when my grandmother had a stroke and worked for the school for a year, then began working with the tribe as an administrative assistant.

In 1984, there was a movement among the Western Shoshone to pull together to fight for Western Shoshone land rights and money. I began as the secretary taking notes. About that time, Bob Fulkerson, with Citizen Alert, and Bill Rosse, a Western Shoshone from Yomba, began coming to the Western Shoshone National Council and raising the issue of testing.

Jerry Millett was [00:10:00] the chief of the Western Shoshone National Council. Carrie and Mary Dann were very active. Pauline Estevez from Timbisha [Shoshone Tribe, California] and others caravanned down to the test site to find out just what exactly was going on. I can't remember what year it was. The American Peace Test group was very active. As we drove into Vegas, we went to Ian Zabarte's mother's house and heard on the news that we were leading the folks onto the test site. Well, we didn't know until then. Joel Friedman who is a filmmaker out of New York City was there. We quickly learned what it was about and we did lead the group onto the test site. That was really my introduction.

*But someone knew you were coming, for you to make this—*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Well, Bill Rosse had been working very closely with the American Peace Test group.

That was my introduction in the early eighties. I also sat on Citizen Alert's Native American Advisory Board as a Native advisor. My brother was the program coordinator. He began working, I believe, in 1990 or 1991. It was an activist group in terms of protesting the testing, fighting for religious freedom, and opposing mining in Nevada. My brother was diagnosed with leukemia two to three months after he began the job. I helped him write grants and do reports as he became more and more ill. On July 30, 1993 he died and I was asked to step

into his position. Joe was very active working with Citizen Alert. He was also one of the initial people to start the Indigenous Environmental Network down in Dilkon, Arizona that was dealing with mining contamination and mining of uranium.

And so I began in October of 1993. In December of 1993, as the director of Citizen Alert Native American Program, I was invited to a meeting of the Western Shoshone National Council. Diane Quigley with the Childhood Cancer Research Institute was also invited. Now during 1992, Ian Zabarte was instrumental in doing the Healing Global Wounds event down in Las Vegas and at the test site. He had made connections with Diane then. At that meeting, the questions that the Western Shoshone National Council put to the group centered around Pauline Estevez and other Western Shoshone representatives traveling up from Death Valley to Austin, Nevada, the central meeting place. She described some odd looking deer, buck, that they had seen regularly—full size body, short legs—and they wondered if it had something to do with the fallout. The other questions were about the fallout traveling over Shoshone communities; people were ill and they told us the effects. Diane Quigley, because she had been involved with research and had direct access to Alice Stewart of England said, We'll find out. We can look into that and find out what DOE has available. They looked at me and said, What can you guys do? And I said, Well, we have direct access to Native communities. We do community education. Diane's car broke down so she drove back to Duckwater with me and we began talking about what we could pull together. And that was my initial involvement.

**[00:15:00]** *There are a couple of questions I had about what you've said. Your brother's name was—?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Joe. Joe Sanchez.

*Joe Sanchez. And what year was he born?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** He was born in 1956. We grew up near Carson City, living in Stewart and traveled to Duckwater every summer. In terms of *where* the cancer came from, we don't actually know, but my curiosity and getting involved in the research and the atmospheric fallout really stemmed from my brother's illness.

*Understandably. That must be hard, losing your brother.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Well, the wonderful thing was I was three months pregnant with her [Cora, daughter] when he passed away; truly a gift from God. I was thirty-nine years old, I mean an old mama.

*Oh, how wonderful. That's great. The other thing I wanted to ask you about was when you first went to the test site, that time you're describing, what was that like? Did you all go out there and protest, or what was that like, that first time you went? Did you lead people in?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It was amazing. As we drove in, there was highway patrol, police, security, lined up. We went in the Mercury gate; they were lined up the way down with their vehicles. Jerry Millett was taken aside. He met with, probably, the Nye County sheriff. He was told that the rumors were people had knives hidden in their ankles or in their boots, that they had cayenne pepper ready to spray at the police. They were told that it was the Indians. Well, I mean of course it wasn't true. We didn't even know we were going to lead the group on the test site. Jerry wanted to go alone so we stayed up late that night trying to figure out who was going. Carrie Dann's sister had told her, *Do not get arrested*. The final word was, *We're all going together*. We had *no* clue exactly what was going to happen except what the American Peace Test group had told us, and we put our faith in just staying together.

As we walked down towards the cattle guard, the entrance right there at Mercury, police were lined up two and three. They were standing with their arms behind their back looking very official at us as we walked down the road. There might've been about eight of us total. Martin Sheen and some Catholic priests were there with us. But Jerry as chief was the first to cross the line. He told them that this is Western Shoshone land based on the Treaty [of Ruby Valley] of 1863; that we had the right to walk across our land and that we opposed nuclear testing. They immediately arrested him, took him and pulled him across and we all went across with him. They loaded us into some buses and took us to Beatty and we stayed there until they released us.

*Were you scared? That's sort of a leading question. What was it like?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** I think it was frustrating. A little bit frightening at first. But I think it was more infuriating because of the reaction of the police officers. I think they thought it was a joke.

*They thought it was a joke?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** And being accused of carrying knives and pepper spray, it was all hype. But I think the fear subsided as soon as they had the plastic cuffs on; many of us were able to slip them off and we all were together. I think it was most frightening for Jerry; he was the spokesperson, he had to lead it.

**[00:20:00]** *He had to go first.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Right. And his experience, for some reason—and I don't know this for a fact—I think it brought back visions of Vietnam. He was in Vietnam and it was really frightening to him. He was more worried about the rest of us and really did want to go in alone, but we weren't going to let him do that.

*Must've been a sense of responsibility or something that you'd have to have, because you don't know what's going to happen when you've got armed people against you.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Oh, and we were far outnumbered.

*What year was this, again? This was ninety—no, eighty, sorry, eighty—?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Nineteen eight-five perhaps; I'd have to go back and look. I need to check on the date, but was early on.

*We've been talking to people down in Las Vegas, some of the protest community among the Catholic Franciscan protesters; I think that began again in the early eighties was when they first started going out there. I think there were protests much, much earlier at the test site.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Back in the late seventies, yes.

*I guess that's right; it was the late seventies that it all began. So, those are my two questions.*

*Help me understand a little about what I've been reading about, sort of from your perspectives.*

*You've been going out—my understanding of what I've been reading is that you've been really dedicating yourselves to a blend of a scientific world view understanding of what those effects might be. But trying to understand what it's really been like for the communities since atomic testing, the way people live their lives and the things they remember, in order to get some sense of what the dose calculation might be for Western Shoshone and was it Southern Paiute people, is that right?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Yes.

*So that involves actually going out and talking to people, I imagine. Tell me a little bit about what that's like.*

**Patricia George:** She did it the first time, so she can tell you her story and then I'll tell you mine.

*OK, you can do the first set. I'm trying to keep track of time. We're going to get you in one more time, Patricia.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** The community research, I think, is a key part of understanding what the DOE studies meant. Diane Quigley, and bringing in the environmental scientists from Clark University, was one piece. But because we lived through it, what was important was to hear from our own people; what their experience was, what was going on, what they remembered. So we began by interviewing and asking about their lifestyle. We had a set of questions and we just sat down with people, targeting the elders because they would have some of the best memories; they lived through it. Because Duckwater is my home community and I knew it the best, I began doing the initial interviews there. Incredible stories. In the valley, there's a mountain range that runs east to west, probably one of the only ones in Nevada. Individuals would talk about seeing the clouds.

This one fellow talked about how he and his brother and father were down on the south side of the reservation and they saw what looked like dust clouds, like a storm was blowing in. They were putting up hay. The father told him, *Stay here, finish up, you two. I'm going to go up north and finish up some other work.* This fellow said that the cloud rolled in; there was no sound, there was no wind. It just went over them and they finished up their work. He said shortly after that, both of them became violently ill: vomiting and chills. Was brought into Ely, checked by the doctor, and they were told that they had pneumonia. But he said he wasn't susceptible to colds after that. [00:25:00]

I interviewed an elderly woman who has passed on here in Ely. Her husband worked on the railroad early in the fifties. She talked about how he worked out when some of the fallout went over and didn't have a shirt on. He had a huge sore after working out all day on his back that never went away. He died and she believes that it had to do with the fallout.

Out in Duckwater, a woman in her late nineties, the oldest woman in the community, remembers the clouds going over and the next day going out and looking in the garden and the leaves of the plants were wilted. But the beans were good, the vegetables were good and they ate them.

Another woman remembers her family getting up to watch the tests. They had a radio and they would listen for the tests and go out early in the morning. They could see the orange glow above those southern mountains. They'd wait and they could feel the tremors eventually through the ground.

Some of the folks remember the dosimeters at the Duckwater School; they never quite knew exactly what they were for. One person told me that her father remembers big patches of dead trees. They'd also see dead animals, like deer. I'm trying to think of some of the others. It's been a while.

*Well, while you're thinking, when you're talking to people, is there any sense that there's any clue about why these things are happening? Is it being connected to the—?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** This woman's father did say it had to do with the testing, there was no question. Some of the women from Moapa, the older women, they'd jump in their cars and drive to watch the beautiful mushroom clouds. And as we did our modules, they began to learn about the test site and understand the radionuclides and the pathways and how they affected humans as well as the environment. We had a woman cry because she was taking Iodine 131 because she had thyroid problems and little did she know that her daughter, who was pregnant, was in the room with her and that the rays would affect her children; they all had thyroid problems. You know, the realization was hard, and sometimes the individual wanted to blame themselves for not knowing.

*Tell me more about that. That's really something that I wouldn't expect, that you should somehow have known.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** And maybe it's more of the maternal, the mother should be protecting the child, but this one particular woman, she somehow felt that she was to blame. We spent some time with her and talked and said of course she couldn't know. And it's probably a mix of emotions. I mean anger with the United States government, the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC]. And the more you learned, they *knew* what was going on. There was no doubt. We were in the sacrifice zone.

My brother, who is four years older than me, grew up in Duckwater with my grandmother, and he remembers—he was young, he wasn't quite a teenager yet—being at the big warm spring. There's a huge geothermal warm spring in Duckwater and people would go there to bathe. He and two cousins were up there and he remembers the fallout. He didn't know what it was. He said, All of a sudden, there was this stuff falling out of the sky. We ran home and asked what it was, and my grandmother didn't know. So they went back outside.

Duckwater didn't get electricity and running water and new houses until the seventies. People lived in their homes primarily to sleep and all the activity went on [00:30:00] outside; hauling water, hunting, fishing, and gathering went on all the time. So their lifestyle was all outside. I mean the people lived off the land. It wasn't until the seventies with the electricity, running water, and better housing that people spent more time inside.

*So there wasn't even warning about going inside or any of these kinds of things that you sometimes hear happened in Utah?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** There was a particular family that had a radio, but it wasn't a community warning.

**Patricia George:** It just depended on who had access to the media. Some had the newspapers, some had the radio, but it was limited.

**Virginia Sanchez:** But the majority didn't.

**Patricia George:** I had the privilege of interviewing four communities in Northern Nevada. The stories weren't quite as amazing as the ones down south—Ely, Duckwater, Yomba Shoshone tribe, Timbisha, Moapa, the Southern Paiute area, and Southern Utah. A lot of them went out; it was entertainment and an activity to go watch the clouds. Some sat on old boxcars on the railroads to watch. Families went to the mountains, to the mountaintop and had a picnic and watched those clouds.

**Virginia Sanchez:** And it was portrayed as “atoms for peace;” I mean, what mixed messages.

*Yes, what were the messages that—?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** That it was good for the country. And how it was internalized by the communities, I'm not quite sure; we didn't get to that level of questioning.

*“Atoms for peace” or defense of the country in the Cold War, those kinds of things?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Yes.

*So before you have to go, Patricia, tell me a little bit more about when you first went out and what that was like.*

**Patricia George:** I think the overall experience was just learning about the lifestyle and what my people had to go through; the way they lived, how they lived, the food, the environment, and learning about all the impacts. Knowing now what had happened to them and having to see them suffer and lose a lot of families, and the children who have to suffer with the health issues now.

*You've said a couple of things that I think are important. Am I correct in understanding that one of the things that happened when you would go out is that you'd be getting stories about the lifeways in that era which were different from your own? Is that true?*

**Patricia George:** Yes. Just as Virginia has said, the majority of the families, especially down south, were outside 95 percent of the time. The only time they would probably be inside more is during the winter. But you know, they ate what was there; the wildlife, gathering of pine nuts and berries, and all of it. And even with the dairy farms or the orchards, people would share those foods.

*Oh, right. So even if your own place might not have necessarily been in an area that had fallout, then you might share that food?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*Because I think it's true a lot of times when—the traditional look at fallout has to do with things hitting you, except in the case of dairy cows, than ingesting things, which [00:35:00] is what I'm understanding from what I'm reading and what you're saying. Those pathways have not been adequately understood.*

**Patricia George:** The families, like from Moapa Reservation, if they weren't fortunate enough to have their own milk or their own milk cow, somebody else would have it and they would share that with them. So I mean the exposure was just all around.

*Right, and then all the interconnections between people. There was something else I wanted to ask you about what you said. I'm understanding that the scientists then that are working with you are trying to track that, but people are reporting increases in deaths and illnesses in their families. That's significant, is that right?*

**Patricia George:** Yes. Back then, when they began their story, they would remember their neighbors or somebody in their family who was ill and they would describe the illness and it was cancerous, but they didn't know that.

*So they would describe what we now know would be symptoms of cancer.*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*Was it hard to do that work?*

**Patricia George:** It was, because you have to hear their pain, the sufferings they had to go through. And if they don't understand and you have more of an understanding, it's hard. Then when you interview the person and they're suffering with health effects and then they're no longer here and you see their family. It's a whole community healing, from the time it started to now.

*"A community healing"? Tell me more about what you mean. What do you mean by that?*

**Patricia George:** Just the overt pain and suffering that they had to go through and trying to educate them and hoping to heal together.

*That's really interesting, what you're saying. Because I think a natural human reaction to just reading some of the things in here and what you're saying is how much suffering occurred. And what I seem to hear you saying is that even though you can't necessarily cure those illnesses, the talking about it, the understanding of it, is part of some kind of healing process, is that right?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*And where are things now for you? Like you have this big meeting today. You're continuing to—you meet and you—you have to inform me about how this all works because I really don't know.*

**Patricia George:** We're putting the information together and we're wrapping up our grants and hoping to look at more funding. But a lot of that has kind of been put to the side so we can work on other organizational matters.

*Oh, really? OK.*

**Patricia George:** Yes. So it's been a while, we've stepped out of that a little bit, but there's always the reflection time.

*So when you think about it, is there something that you've gotten that makes you change in yourself about how you would do things in the future. I mean I'm thinking about what's happening now in the state with Yucca Mountain and those kinds of things.*

**Patricia George:** There is a lot of concern because you want your people to know. That's what we're trying to do. Letting them know what happened, educating them, and hoping to prepare them for anything that might repeat itself. And hoping that you've helped.

*I think that's really profound, what you've just said, because the notion that this thing [00:40:00] happened and you didn't know what it was is really something. I think that's one of the main issues of the test site, of course, is that it was so secret that a lot of people didn't know what it was.*

*Have you had an interaction with the DOE type people that did these kinds of studies? Are you showing them these results, or is there any sort of thing happening there as far as them understanding that maybe the way they put together an understanding of effects might not be complete?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Yes. Bruce Church met with us, and Hazel O'Leary had a woman that worked with her; I cannot remember her name. Do you remember the meeting down in Las Vegas? Maybe not. Peter? [Ford, sitting in on interview]. Early on, it had to be, before 1997,

Church's response was, Let's update the dose reconstruction study. This opened the door to us. Some response was, Well, of course, you were included. You were under the shepherd lifestyle. Our response was, It was totally inadequate. And had you considered us, you would've realized that our lifestyle was totally different than a shepherd's lifestyle. I remember it was Hazel O'Leary's assistant, and I cannot remember her name. Their banner was "trust." It had something to do with trusting them. Our response was, Wait a minute. You're talking to people where every treaty across this continent was broken, and you're trying to tell us to trust you? It was early on and so generally we butted heads. We haven't, at this point, interacted a whole lot with them. We've gone through some organizational development and we've had some growing pains. I think at this point we've got some renewed energy and vision and we'll see where it goes. We're really wanting to take a look at the transportation, planning for monitoring the transportation routes. You know, there is low-level waste traveling through Ely and along the roadways down to the test site all the time. But the idea of Yucca Mountain and the increase of the spent fuel, we need to take a look at that. We want to look at getting out into the communities more. Tomorrow we'll be taking a look at curriculum. We bit off a whole lot. The group that we're working with comes from all walks of life. We had the grandmas, we had spiritual leaders, community health representatives. Peter [Ford?] was really instrumental in opening the door to the health clinics. We've had educators, activists, a real mix. And not only that, but we're working with environmental health scientists from the East Coast. I mean a lot of different groups that we've had to mesh.

*Yes. I think I mentioned before we turned on the machine that I know something of participatory research. And the thing that struck me when I was reading the papers you gave me is that you implemented it and you actually did something. Because just for the reasons you've said, I think*

*it's a terribly difficult thing to do, to have a real "research project," either social or scientific, or socio-scientific in your case, that actually is truly that. When you're committed to those values of having community involvement and the experts and the scientists and all that. It's terribly difficult to do, because people, as you say, have all different points of view and all different sets of skills. And so that, to me, is one of [00:45:00] the most impressive things about what you've done in that world. I don't know anything quite like it; not that I'm an expert in those kinds of things, but I think it's really striking that you actually have done what you did.*

*And the other thing that I think is really touching me right now is this whole intertwining of these terrible health effects with your gathering of these stories. Now you correct me, you're the experts on this, but really stories of a life that isn't lived by that many people anymore; as far as the traveling and the hunting and those ways. So I'm curious what you've done. Did you make recordings? Did you take notes? Is that somehow preserved for your group or your people, these old stories that you got from the elders?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** We do have some recorded on tape, those that allowed us to tape them, and we've transcribed them. We need to discuss just how we move forward with that information. *I think you're right, that's really precious information and I hope you do move forward with it in some way because I'm sure that this is valuable. As an outsider, it would be valuable, I think, for the larger world to know, but certainly it's valuable for you, obviously.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Right. Brings back a lot of memories.

**Patricia George:** It does. The Southern Paiutes have lost a whole lot of their elders to the fallout. You talk about an elder in their community and you're looking at anyone age forty-five. They're under fifty anyway. Those are their elders now.

*Oh my God. And then you talk and you find out that these were cancers and these kinds of things?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*Wow. [Pause] I'm going to pause this.*

**[00:47:53]** End Track 2, Disc 1.

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

*So I don't really know what else to ask now except if there's any other things that come to your mind about just what you've done and what your other thoughts are about. What you just said about the Southern Paiute elders is so incredible to me. And they're seeing illnesses in their children as well, I imagine.*

**Patricia George:** Yes. Thyroid diseases. Well, I don't know what else to share.

*Let me see if I have anything else here. I guess there is something that struck me again as I was reading your articles. Two things: that in this situation of the testing starting in the early fifties through its stopping and beyond, you're just an embodiment of a real clash of world views, I guess this is the only way I can put it, and I wondered if you had any thoughts about, as you go forward with talking to people, what was happening on the other side. How could it be that there would be this whole powerful organization, industry and government contractors, putting this forth, and then a world view and a lifestyle that's so counter to that happening at the same place? Does that make any sense to you? No. It struck me that it's so striking, if I sit down and talk to a test site official, for example, which I do, there's a whole other narrative that's going on about the importance of testing and the Cold War all these kinds of things and that's really strikingly different than talking to a Franciscan priest who's a protester or talking to you all. I wonder how you think about that?.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** I think I grew up in that world, so it's not something I think about; it's just accepted.

*But that's what I want to understand better. When you say you "grew up in that world," what is that?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It's growing up as an indigenous person. I grew up in Stewart and there was a huge population of Indians, all kinds of Indians, going to school there. I traveled into Carson City and during the summers, came out to Duckwater. We'd stay at my grandmother's house, go out and bring in the wood and haul water. We used "Indian refrigerators," little boxes with screens, burlap over them to keep things wet. Completely different worlds. And you pretty much accepted that as an Indian person, *you are different*. I remember going to kindergarten, walking in late, and I had on these red-brown shoes. I thought they were beautiful, but when I walked in, these two girls made fun of me, and I knew it *because I was an Indian*. It's just the world that you grow up in and you learn to adjust. Doesn't mean it's right.

*You were shaking your head, Patricia.*

**Patricia George:** Well, I was remembering school too. I was probably nine years old, and my first day of school, I walked in the class and the kids kept saying, *There is an Indian in here. There's an Indian in here. And they're looking right at me. I turned and looked behind me. And that was my difference. I knew I was different.*

*I guess connected to this, another thing I was wondering about—you'll have to enlighten me—is this whole notion of risk. People talk a lot about it with the test site, that the [00:05:00] goals for nuclear testing, from the official point of view, sort of justified the risk to people. Now actually when I go back and look at some of the earlier historical documents, I'm not sure that everyone actually agreed with that; even some of the originators. I think once it got going, it was a*

*machine that had a momentum and wasn't going to stop. I think some of the Los Alamos people were really worrying about a continental test site: was it ever worth the risk to people to do nuclear testing here? Of course, it was OK to do it out on the islands[Pacific Proving Ground], away from here. But I just wondered if—I mean I may be being too abstract—but I wonder if that's something you thought about, this whole notion that there was an acceptable risk. I think that's one of the arguments that's given: We were in a Cold War and bad things might happen to some people but we're going to try to prevent them from happening by warning them or whatever.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** I suppose it's different if you're in the leadership position of a country. But I think if those leaders had watched their family members die from cancer and being willing to risk their own family members, it might've been a little different. I mean to say it's OK for people, smaller populations, but that's unacceptable to me. It's like today. Let some of these leaders that helped initiate this war [in Iraq] lead those wars by getting out there on the front lines, and go to war themselves. I just don't see it. I think to look at it in an abstract way is not realistic. To say it's OK to let some people die, I just don't think the risk was thought about fully. I think sometimes power and the need to win are so important that you lose track of the importance of life. Knowing how people lived in the fifties, Indian people were not quite always thought of as human. Or just knowing the stories from my family. how women were raped. The ranchers that did this wouldn't go next door and rape the white ranchers' wife. You know, I just don't know how leaders would be willing to sacrifice human beings, knowing exactly what they were doing.

*I didn't know that about what you just said, about the ranchers and the rapes. I know very little about this.*

Well, in our whole history of land rights, the Western Shoshone, let alone all the other tribes, we were totally ripped off. And it hasn't ended. We had a treaty, we had a treaty of peace and friendship. But it was never honored by the federal government. They did whatever they could to protect their own liability, just as they did with the testing. The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act is not enough. But if they had to pay back what individuals went through, it would break the government. They're not going to allow that to happen. It's not enough. But they did it to protect their own liability. They knew exactly what they were doing.

*[00:10:00] Something else. When you said that, it reminded me of the test site lands. You still go onto those lands and use those lands, and when we went on a tour, they were saying, well, sometimes the Indian people come over and use those lands. You're still traveling on those lands, is that right?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** On the Nevada Test Site? Not that I'm aware of. There was a family that lived in Duckwater, Ted Williams, they used to hunt, when the test site was formed, on the northwest corner, and they were run off. Now there may be some agreement with some of the tribes.

*I don't think that there's any agreement.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** I don't know.

**Patricia George:** When did they start putting the border there, do you know? Because I understood there was a family in that Kawich Valley that lived there until they were found and told to move out of there.

*Maybe that's what I heard. The what Valley?*

**Patricia George:** Kawich. Ted Williams worked at the Nevada Test Site.

*That was another question I had. I know that Mr. Reilley in his interview said he worked as a security guard. I'm trying to figure out where that was from that interview. I'm going to ask him about that in a minute. But I know that that it's also true that Indian people worked at the test site. Down in Las Vegas, they have these breakfasts of these retired test site people, various kinds, and I went to a couple of breakfasts for miners. I met a Shoshone man there who was a miner and was on oxygen from something from that. I'm hoping I can talk to him. But I know that that's also true, that people who were Downwinders and so probably got some exposure as workers.*

**Patricia George:** And others who ranched down in that area. A Shoshone man worked there on the Nevada Test Site; he was part of the ones that, after the bombs were let off, they had go down and get soil samples. They had to wear a white suit or something and then come back up and shower down. But he now has prostate cancer.

*Does he? And he did that job?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*So that's the underground testing, where they go down in the holes afterwards, I guess. Can you tell me anything, a little bit about what you all are working on now, or is that something that's a different subject?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** We're planning to apply for some new funding to do the monitoring of transportation. We've received some funding from ATSDR, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, in the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

**Patricia George:** The Center for Disease Control.

**Virginia Sanchez:** Right, and we have a small grant from Resolve through Clark University, that one's for transportation, as well. ATSDR funded community outreach and education; we'll be

taking a look at curriculum tomorrow and doing some planning on what else we want to do.

Patricia's been working with individuals to apply for radiation exposure compensation and we want to expand on that. Finding health records and such, the whole process is [00:15:00] so bureaucratic that there's a real need for that, and so we're going to spend some time and go after monies to do that.

*For the health records.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Right.

*I met this guy down in Las Vegas, Joe—he's the administrator of that thing, so you must know him. I'm trying to remember his last name [Krachenfels]. He's a big, tall guy, and there's an office on—I guess it's Flamingo. Do you know the guy I'm talking about?*

**Patricia George:** Who is he with?

*He's working with the Department of Labor for the compensation [Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation (EEOIC)].*

**Patricia George:** Oh, it might be the one Bennie knows.

*Oh, I think I'm mixing them up. There's the one for the workers and then you were talking about the one for the Downwinders.*

**Patricia George:** Downwinders onsite.

**Virginia Sanchez:** Tell Mary about the Department of Justice folks that came out and didn't know the counties or the towns in Nevada.

**Patricia George:** I was trying to help people apply for the claim, but we ran into problems. Our people got turned down because the OJ RECA [Office of Justice, Radiation Exposure Compensation Act] representatives claimed that our reservation was not within the eligible counties.

*How is that possible? Which representatives?*

**Patricia George:** The ones who looked at the claims, the applications.

*And this is the Department of Justice?*

**Patricia George:** Yes.

*And how does that happen?*

**Patricia George:** They were not looking at a map and didn't know what the eligible counties were and who lived in there in the towns, cities, and reservations.

*That's unbelievable.*

**Patricia George:** And we had to really verify that the reservation exists, this person lives here and it's within the eligible county. Send them a map, I guess. We're right here.

*I guess so. Exactly. And again, when I was reading this transcript of Mr. Reilley's, that place where he's saying how you actually have to have original records; you can't have copies. That, to me, was just really amazing. I wonder what's that about?*

**Patricia George:** When they redid their amendments, they also said for Native people, because we didn't have access to those records like marriage license, birth certificates, school records, that in some way, in an alternative way, you could verify these things, and you didn't have to submit a marriage license if you didn't have that. Well, after they repeatedly asked for these things, we had to turn around and remind them we're a Native people. The marriage is recognized in the Native community or on the reservation, but they don't have a license.

*Why would you need a marriage record anyway, I wonder?*

**Patricia George:** If you're claiming on behalf of your spouse.

*On behalf of your spouse. Oh, on behalf of your deceased spouse. How sad is that. Oh God. And how does that go, though? I mean would you say people are getting through the process and getting any compensation?*

**Patricia George:** Very few that I've helped. Those that applied before the amendments, I encourage to appeal because of the new amendments not requiring certain documentations if you're a Native.

*And that compensation is how much?*

**Patricia George:** Fifty thousand [dollars] for Downwinders and I believe seventy-five thousand for employees, which is nearly not anything compared to what 9/11 victims got.

*Well, yes, and it's nothing, I mean you're talking about a life. I don't have to tell you that. Well, ladies, this is hard stuff. I just have so much respect for you for what you're doing, and I really appreciate you talking to me about it. One of [00:20:00] the things that I feel committed to doing for this project is talking to more people like Mr. Reilley, who are Downwinders who have been affected from your communities. I don't know how people feel about doing that, or if you think that would be a worthwhile thing for me to do. I really wanted to talk to you because I know you have this overview of the situation. But what do you think?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It depends on the individual. I think it's a good idea, and I may know of a few people that you might be able to interview. I'd like to talk to them first. How long is the project?

*Three more years. I'll be around. And this, as you know, is new for me, this piece of it, but it was always very important for me. It's my first time in Ely and this part of the country. We went to the Great Basin yesterday.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** How did you like that?

*Oh, we just could not believe how beautiful it is here. We drove to the top. I was wondering, there must be a Native word for that Wheeler Peak?*

**Virginia Sanchez:** Mount Wheeler? Bennie, do you know the name of Mount Wheeler, the Shoshone name?

**Bennie Reilley Sr.:** Mount Wheeler.

*Call it Mount Wheeler. But I just was awestruck by how beautiful it is here.*

**Virginia Sanchez:** It's beautiful.

*That's why we came a day early. We thought we'd see some of the territory.*

*Is there anything else you can think of that I should know at this point?*

**Patricia George:** I can't think of anything but I mean if you still have any questions, we're both available.

*Great. I think for me this is really just, as much as one reads, it's just different to sit down and talk to people and to really begin to get a sense of what this thing that we call the Nevada Test Site. It's a concept, isn't it? My God. And so to really understand what that has meant in the lives of all different kinds of people, it's a learning experience for me. So I really appreciate you taking the time to help me understand some of it. And I just, as I said, have the deepest respect for what you're doing because it must be very difficult. But I also am really touched by what you both have said about the healing aspect and that notion that finding out at least what went on is so important.*

[00:22:57] End Track 3, Disk 1.

[End of interview]