

Desert Voices

The Newsletter of Nevada Desert Experience • Volume 18, Number 1, • April 2005

ISSN 1539-9869

"But Did You Accomplish Anything?"

A Quaker Witness at the Nevada Test Site

by Claire Gorfinkel

I participated in the Quaker weekend at the Nevada Test Site, over the Presidents' Day three-day weekend in February. This was actually my fourth trip to the test site with NDE in a span of fifteen years, so I came with lots of hopes and expectations.

The forty of us were remarkably diverse in terms of age and experience: five high school students and three of their teachers from the Woolman Semester (a project of the former John Woolman [Quaker] School in Grass Valley) were among a dozen teenagers that participated alongside life-long activists now in their 70s and 80s, and lots of folks in between. Thus for some it would be their first experience of public protest while others brought long-term struggles over how to increase the pressure ("raise the ante" in Las Vegas?) on the government and the nuclear weapons industry, in the context of an ongoing war, immense ecological threats and the upcoming 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The organizers worked valiantly to build a sense of community among us. They encouraged the young people to see the bright lights as well as the other side of Las Vegas by helping to serve breakfast to homeless people alongside the Catholic Worker community. We came together in worship (both programmed and silent). We used exercises and role-plays to explore our many different attitudes towards nonviolence. We heard from Native Americans whose land had been appropriated and polluted beyond repair. We heard from a local community organizer who has been working for years to awaken Nevadans to the environmental and economic disaster in their midst. We were deeply stirred by one Friend's story of her husband's death due to nuclear testing in the 1950s.

See But did you? on page 2

August Desert Witness 2005

Many Voices, One Vision for a Nuclear-Free World

Plans are well underway for the August Desert Witness Event to be held in Las Vegas this summer. The conference is entitled *Many Voices, One Vision for a Nuclear-free World*. Nevada Desert Experience and Pax Christi USA are the sponsors of the event, with many other co-sponsors and supporters. The event will be held in Las Vegas from August 4-7, 2005. The event will be held at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) with a Saturday evening trip to the entrance of the Nevada Test Site, approximately 65 miles northwest of town. Housing will be available on the UNLV campus, with limited sleeping bag space available at a church nearby. A copy of the registration form can be found on page 7 of this newsletter or on our website.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the dropping of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Polls indicate that a majority of Americans are opposed to nuclear weapons. However, The United States is spending more on nuclear weapons programs now than during the Cold War.

Nationwide, organizers are trying to focus activities at four locations around the country in a concerted effort to draw media attention to large crowds opposed
See August Events on page 3

Our weekend was uniquely focused on the opening of the new Atomic Testing Museum, which presented us with many challenges. For some, the museum represented a massive contradiction of our deepest values: an obscene celebration of technology, weapons manufacture and testing, and ultimately war. For others the museum opening offered an almost sacred opportunity: to learn from people very different from ourselves — people who believed they had devoted their lifetimes to protecting our nation from war and terrorism — and possibly break down some stereotypes on both sides.

After all the talk, all the preparation, nothing quite compares with the experience of seeing the Nevada Test Site itself. Whether we were first-time visitors or had been there many times before, many of us were moved to tears during an hour of silent worship as that enormous landscape cried out to us. And from there the intense sensory input of the new museum was also overwhelming. The museum staff welcomed our curbside protest (“we built these weapons to protect your right to protest”) invited us in and asked to have our signs for their permanent collection. It was hard not to be totally appalled at the life-size cardboard cutout model of “Miss Atomic Test” wearing a mushroom cloud in lieu of a bathing suit, and the gift shop selling key-chain sized replicas of “Fat Boy” and “Little Man” (the names given to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively). It was tough arguing with a docent about the meaning of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when she knew (“I have a Japanese neighbor and she told me ...”) that the bombing was necessary because the Emperor of Japan was not going to surrender.

I had hoped for greater diversity: I wanted to spend the weekend with our Quaker colleagues from the Mountain states as well as California. I had hoped for more education: on the current status of nuclear weapons production and testing, and pending test-ban legislation in the Congress. I had hoped we would be more strategic: What’s going on with other anti-nuclear activists around the country; what’s being planned around the 60th Anniversary in August? How can we have an impact? What I really wanted was to throw my body into the machine and stop the nuclear industry.

So when I came home, and my friends told me how grateful they were that I had gone to Nevada to protest nuclear weapons, and they asked me: “But did you accomplish anything?” I had to reply “no.” “No, we didn’t exactly accomplish any measurable things, but we did encourage a few new activists. We deepened our connections with one another. Some of us did reach out to the docents at the museum. Folks on the street honked their horns and cheered our protest signs.” And in the end I felt an overwhelming sense of joy and satisfaction, because once again, if nothing else, we had been there.

Claire Gorfinkel is a social change activist and writer in Southern California who calls herself a “Quakerish” Jew.

NDE -Co-sponsors Bike Ride

This summer Bike Chain Response is organizing an interfaith bike ride from the Nevada Test Site to Los Alamos National Laboratory to raise awareness of alternative modes of transportation, to raise awareness of the tragedy of the nuclear weapons industry and to dialogue with scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The approximately 800 mile bike ride will begin at the Nevada Test Site on Sunday June 19th and is scheduled to arrive in Los Alamos on Sunday July 17th. The organizers are seeking riders and sponsors. Contact:

Trinity Nuclear Abolitionists
c/o BIKE CHAIN RESPONSE
POB 4099
Albuquerque, NM 87196
(505) 870-2-ASK

Registrations for the ride and more information on <http://www.lovarchy.org/ride/>

to nuclear weapons construction and their deployment. A listing of other national events can be found on page 4. NDE encourages all of its supporters from around the country to be involved in activities in one of these locations.

Plans and programming are still being developed, but a basic schedule is listed in the next column. Featured presenters currently scheduled include David Robinson, Executive Director of Pax Christi USA; Janet Chisholm, Las Vegas native and Nonviolence Training coordinator with the Fellowship of Reconciliation; John Dear, SJ, long time peace activist and Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace; and Bishop Steven Charleston, a Native American former Episcopal bishop of Alaska and current dean of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge MA. There will also be workshops by Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Center for Nonviolent Communication, and Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service.

Musicians and performers include: Emma's Revolution, Jesse Manibusan, Eth-Noh-Tec, and the Omega West Dance Company. Other speakers and performers will be announced. We encourage folks to check our website at www.NevadaDesertExperience.org for more information.

On Friday afternoon, August 5, there will be Teach-in workshops held for conference participants, on topics that include: US global militarism and poverty; nuclear weapons and the environment; nuclear racism; nuclear weapons; globalization and the crisis of the world order; the Nevada Test Site; international law; militarism and education; and movement building for social change. Workshops will be held by a variety of presenters, including representatives from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Western States Legal Foundation, Citizen Alert, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Pax Christi USA. Many of these organizations are cosponsors and endorsers of the event. A listing of supporting organizations can be found on page 6.

Nevada Desert Experience Board and Staff look forward to seeing a good turnout for this event to send a clear message to the nation that people do not support nuclear escalation. We hope to see you in August. Contact information for questions can be found on the registration form on page 7 of this newsletter.

Preliminary Schedule of Events for the August Conference

Thursday August 4

- 4.00 pm Registration begins at UNLV
- 5.30 pm Dinner
- 7.00 pm Opening Ritual - Western Shoshone Nation
- 8.00 pm Evening speaker and activities

Friday August 5

- 7.00 am Optional prayer and meditation
- 7.30 am Breakfast
- 9.00 am Panel: ~ Perspectives on Nonviolence
- 10.00 am Nonviolence Workshops
 - Bay Area NVC - Nonviolent Communication and Social Change
 - Pace e Bene - From Violence to Wholeness
 - Fellowship of Reconciliation - Crating a Culture of Peace
- 1.00 pm Lunch
- 2.30 pm Teach-in workshops
- 5.30 pm Dinner
- 7.00 pm Keynote Speaker
- 8.30 pm Music performance ~Emma's Revolution

Saturday August 6

- 7.00 am Optional prayer and meditation
- 7.30 am Breakfast
- 9.00 am Music performance ~Jesse Manibusan
- 10.00 am Morning Speakers
- 11.00 am Dramatic performance ~Eth-Noh-Tec
- 12.00noon Lunch
- 1.30 pm Afternoon Speakers
- 2.30 pm Logistical overview of upcoming witness
- 3.15 pm Nonviolence Trainings
- 5.00 pm Dinner
- 6.30 pm Evening Speakers
- 8.00 pm Begin leaving for Nevada Test Site
- 9.15 pm Nevada Test Site witness

Sunday August 7

- 5.30 am Optional Sunrise Ceremony at Test Site
- 8.00 am Breakfast
- 9.30 am Religious services or Public witness in Vegas
- 12.00noon Lunch
- 1.30 pm "Next Steps in Movement Building"
- 3.00 pm Closing Ceremony
 - ~ Omega West Dance Company

National August 6 and 9 Events

Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, California

"Seeds of Change"

Celebrate the vision of a nuclear free world with music, a dinner rally and candlelight march.

Where:

William Payne Park, 5800 Patterson Pass Rd. Livermore

When: Saturday, August 6, 2005, 5 pm

Contact: Tara Dorabji, Tri-Valley CARES
tara@trivalleycares.org 925.443.7148
www.trivalleycares.org

Los Alamos Nuclear Weapons Lab, New Mexico

"Hiroshima, 60 Years:

It started Here - Let's stop It Here"

Teach-In, Sunflower Pageant, workshops, music, candle ritual, meditation, and more

Where: Ashley Pond Park in Los Alamos, NM

When: Saturday, August 6, 2005, 8:30 am to 10:00 pm

Contact: Los Alamos Study Group 505.265.1200 or
Pax Christi New Mexico 505.870.2275 or
Upaya Zen Center 505.986.8182

Y-12 Nuclear Facility, Tennessee

"Stop the Bombs!"

Remembrance/names ceremony, Peace March, Rally and direct actions, and peace lantern ceremony.

Where:

Y-12 national Security Complex, Oak Ridge, TN

When: August 6, 2005, all day

Contact: Ralph Hutchison
Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance
865.483.8202
www.stopthebombs.org

August 9, 2005:

Remember the Bombing of Nagasaki

Readings, lantern lighting ceremonies, shadow projects and more - will vary from town to town.

Where: Your town

When: August 9

Contact: Jackie Cabasso, 510.839.5877
www.wslfweb.org
www.abolitionnow.org

Poems from the Peace Walk

by Gina Sconza

DESERT SKY

Whose dawn is this that lights up my night sky,
a bird takes wing and dots the darkish hues,
a flashing light, a lone car breaks the ink as I
in silence look for new-born rays.

And as I fix on gold-tinged clouds, a plane
traverses luxur's light in search of rest, and I,
awake to dawn's epiphany, see sky's true light
beyond morning's mirage.

3.22.05

DESERT LABYRINTH

We search for mazes made by human hands,
stone stacked with care upon each sister stone
that mark the path unfolding up ahead,
with turns and twists echoing our hearts
resounding as our souls mark out the steps,
yet here where weary feet walk desert floor
where arid life grows clustered and in clumps,
in trinities, in sacred circle stands
of thirsty thorns, of stamens, sepals, fronds
the invitation comes to us to stop,
to see, to kiss the earth with every step,
to hear the rhythms of the desert's song,
its simple melody, its humble hum
reminding us the walk's our only goal:
whatever our feet touch is holy ground.

3.24.05 Sunrise, Holy Thursday

MYSTIC RIVER

(for my comrades on the journey, with thanks)

We cross the banks and see there's no divide,
the waters part, we walk, and still they flow
around us, swirling, singing to our souls
these waters in turn hum their harmony
while over us their waves rise as a wall
engulfing with anointing energy
and underfoot we feel their sacred balm
caressing with their infinite release
as through us waters flow from one sweet source
and mystic river binds us heart and soul
to this great Mother earth, to her great web,
to life and love and longing to be one.

3.25.05 Sunrise, Good Friday

First time walker Gina Sconza lives in Oakland CA. She is passionate about art, activism, and ritual

At Las Vegas Reflects on the Quaker Lenten Weekend

Growing up in Las Vegas, you get desensitized to certain things—the metal palm trees in the airport, the billboards featuring breasts and buttocks, and the clang of quarters and jangling alarms when someone hits the jackpot. You get desensitized to the idea of nuclear weapons testing in your backyard.

I remember many things about growing up here: the hospital in Henderson where I was born, Saint Rose De Lima, now called Saint Rose Dominican. I remember the fields where I played soccer as a child, the high school I attended, Red Rock Canyon where I went to work out teenage angst. I remember the hospital where, for the first time, I held my son.

I also remember the first time I heard about the Nevada Test Site. I remember the smell of Elmer's glue, and of dust, and of children sweaty from outside play in the desert heat. We were told that the Nevada Test Site was a good thing for Las Vegas; it brought jobs and money into our community. Our teacher laughed with the presenter about the way the cocktail waitresses wore mushroom cloud uniforms. Some of the children in my class had parents who worked at the test site. We didn't talk about down-winders, and we didn't talk about the dangers of radiation sickness. We didn't talk about groundwater pollution. The closest we came was talking about how Las Vegas' population was low, and anyway, the weapons were no longer tested above ground. I never connected the Test Site, which I saw as good for Nevada, or at least, not harmful to Nevadans, with events like Hiroshima. How could something so beneficial to Las Vegas be bad?

When I decided to attend NDE's Quaker Weekend, I had a more mature niggling notion that the explosion of nuclear weapons wasn't such a hot idea, but I had been told that it was safe. It seemed to me that this might be a case of much ado about nothing. At Quaker weekend, I learned, for the first time, about the illnesses suffered by test site workers. I learned, for the first time, there were persons who protested the test site. I learned, for the first time, that our ground water was polluted by the weapons testing. I felt misled and betrayed. Frankly, I was angry. I remain angry.

If you've been to the Atomic Museum, you've seen the side of the story I grew up with—the economic boon the Test Site brought to the state, the almost party light in which it was viewed by the mushroom-cloud wearing cocktail waitresses and their consumers, and that benefits our entire nation gained from the minimal sacrifices of a few Nevadans. There is barely any mention of the downwinders, or the sicknesses suffered by the people (friends and neighbors) who worked at the Test Site, or the pollution to Nevada's groundwater. It sickens me to think that another generation of Nevadans is being told only half the story. But during Quaker weekend, I had the opportunity to speak with a young girl about the purpose of nuclear weapons. I was holding a sign that said, "Who Would Jesus Bomb?" She said, "That doesn't make any sense; Jesus wouldn't bomb anyone." I replied, "I know, that's the point." She looked thoughtful, and I hope she'll reconsider the purposes and results of the Test Site. I hope we all will.

Jennifer Parmeley grew up in Las Vegas. A member of the local Quaker community, she is a law student at the UNLV Boyd School of Law.

Mordechai Vanunu Released from Prison - But not Free

Nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu sent this email to supporters. He continues to face restrictions following his release from prison.

Date: Tue, 12 Apr 2005 08:27:32 +0200

From: mordechai vanunu

Hi Friends.

The news today is not the opening of the trial.

But they decided to renew all the restrictions, for another year, yesterday the police come and gave the papers, saying they decided to continue the restriction, and thinking to make them more severe like not to talk on NWs [nuclear weapons] to any one, So, it means one more year in this Prison state. I will continue to be very free, and exercise my freedom of speech...

vmjc

Death Notices

We are saddened to report the death of two anti-nuclear activists who have been involved with NDE and other groups over the years.

Julia Anne Hernandez died last October. Her husband Ken Bonnell reports that they have recently been involved with Code Pink and Not in Our Name, as well as anti-nuclear activities. As members of Atheists United, they did not support the spiritual foundations of NDE. However, we were fellow travelers on the road to peace and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

“No Nukes” Norb - Lawrence “Norb” Drouhard, a long-time International Peace activist died April 6 at the Catholic Worker House in Las Vegas, NV. He was 80. Drouhard, a U.S. Army WWII veteran had been active in the Anti-nuclear and Peace movement since the 1980s, having been involved in the NDE Peace Walk on several occasions, most recently attending this year’s Good Friday protest at the Nevada Test Site. He had participated in peace marches on five continents including a march across the former Soviet Union in the 1980s. Norb was also a part of the Middle Passage Pilgrimage in 1998, dedicated to reversing the paths of slavery in the United States. Norb was known in Las Vegas and elsewhere for his peace vigils, showing up in his car, which was hand decorated with slogans and statistics about the effects of war and casualties. He was a member of Veterans for Peace and graduate of the University of Kansas.

August Conference Sponsors and Endorsers

The groups listed below have been involved with planning and supporting our August Events. We thank them for the hard work so far and look forward to joining together with them in August.

Sponsored by:

Nevada Desert Experience
Pax Christi USA

Co-sponsored by:

Buddhist Peace Fellowship,
Citizen Alert,
Episcopal Peace Fellowship,
Nuclear Age Peace Foundation,
Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service,
Physicians for Social Responsibility (L.A.)
Western States Legal Foundation.

Endorsed by:

Global Exchange,
Voices in the Wilderness,
Las Vegas Catholic Worker,
Tri-Valley CARES,
American Friends Service Committee (Pasadena Office),
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (L.A.),
Presbyterians United for Peace and Justice,
San Diego Peace Resource Center.

Supported by:

The Western Shoshone National Council

Registration Form for August 2005 Events

PO Box 46645
Las Vegas NV 89114-6645
702.646.4814 (phone)
nde_august@peacenet.org
www.NevadaDesertExperience.org

A deposit of at least \$25 must accompany this form. Each person should fill out a separate form. Copy this form or download a form from our website at www.NevadaDesertExperience.org
Hard copies of the form may be requested by calling the Nevada Desert Experience Office.

A \$15 discount will be given to those whose registration is postmarked before June 15, 2005. **Early registration is encouraged.**

Registration

Discounted Registration

with registration postmarked before June 15, 2005 \$130 _____

Registration (after June 15, 2005) \$145 _____

Housing

Please circle the night(s) you will need accommodation.

Thursday Friday Saturday

Single Occupancy (per night) \$45/night _____

Double Occupancy (per night) \$30/night _____

Sleeping bag space (per night)
(available on a limited basis) \$10/night _____

commuter? Yes _____ No _____

Meals

9 meal package (Thurs – dinner, Fri – 3 meals,
Sat – 3 meals, Sun – breakfast and lunch) \$60 _____

8 meal package
(Fri – 3 meals, Sat – 3 meals, Sun – 2 meals) \$52 _____

6 meal package
(Fri – dinner, Sat – 3 meals, Sun – 2 meals) \$40 _____

5 meal package
(Sat – 3 meals, Sun – 2 meals) \$33 _____

Scholarship Fund Donation

To help those with limited income to attend \$ _____

Total amount due \$ _____

(at least \$25 must be sent)

Total amount enclosed \$ _____

Additional information

Roommate preference _____

I prefer vegetarian meals Yes _____ No _____

Mobility challenged Yes _____ No _____

Wheelchair accessible accommodations needed Yes _____ No _____

Please check here if you will provide your own transportation to the Nevada Test Site on Saturday evening, August 6. _____

Please send one form for each person.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

email: _____

Best way to reach you: _____

***AUGUST IS THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF ATOMIC
WEAPONS USAGE***

SEE PAGE 1 FOR NDE EVENTS IN LAS VEGAS

Nevada Desert Experience is a non-profit group, with 501 c 3 status, so your donations are tax-deductable. If you need a receipt for your tax records, please don't hesitate to ask! We are happy to provide receipts upon request for your donations.

***Nevada Desert Experience
P.O. Box 46645
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Nonprofit Organization

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

August Desert Witness 2005

August 4-7, 2005

Conference and Action to be held in Las Vegas and the Nevada Test Site

***Many Voices, One Vision for a Nuclear-Free
World***

Sponsored by

Nevada Desert Experience and Pax Christi USA

See page 1 for Story