

# Desert Voices

The Newsletter of Nevada Desert Experience • Volume 18, Number 2, • June 2005

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Dear Friends,

These past months have been a hopeful time in many ways.

With Sister Megan Rice, she joining us this month, our staff has grown for three straight years.

New relationships are being built through outreach across the country. In addition to the outreach local to our offices in Las Vegas and northern California:

- Amy and Zachary have made multiple trips to Southern California and have spoken to church and community groups in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Orange County, Pasadena, and San Diego.
- This April, Zachary traveled to Chicago and met with organizations there and guest lectured at DePaul University.
- This May, Amy and Zachary were in New York City for the opening of the Non-Proliferation Review Conference at the United Nations, networking for the upcoming August Desert Witness commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This spring, Nevada Desert Experience organized successful events for more than 130 participants, including religious and community leaders and more than 30 young people in their teens and twenties.

Answering a new challenge that was presented with the recent opening of Atomic Testing Museum, a joint project of Bechtel Nevada and the Department of Energy, Nevada Desert Experience has taken action. In the past months our staff has engaged in a dialogue with the museum's staff and foundation, building bridges of relationship across generations of mistrust.

From this dialogue a deeply moving event was organized that brought 70 Japanese peace delegates to the museum, some of them Hibakusha (survivors of the atomic bombings), to share their stories with the museum staff and foundation and to dialogue with them about the museum's content.

As we reverently hold the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, in Colombia, and all other places on the planet; it seems appropriate to share our joy and sense of hope with you. Even as the current administration builds its momentum toward endless war-making, we must remember our work and our vision.

Nevada Desert Experience is committed to peacemaking in the rich tradition of nonviolence, recognizing Gandhi's prophetic call:

*"We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence.*

*But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence."*

Join us in the desert this August (4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>), as hundreds gather to remember the genocide of the sisters and brothers in Nagasaki and Hiroshima at the Test Site that has witnessed nearly a thousand atomic blasts.

Support this extraordinary work with the resources you have available: your participation, your prayers, and your ability to give financially. The check you write today will support a dedicated staff and programs that have made a difference for thousands of people.

**Your contribution will make a difference!**

Yours in Peace,  
Zachary Moon  
Program and Development Director

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# *Japanese Delegation Visits Las Vegas*

## A Story of Reconciliation

**By Zachary Moon, Program and Development Director**

It began with an unexpected meeting. Hours into our vigil at the public opening of the Atomic Testing Museum, we were met by the museum's director, Bill Johnson. He welcomed us, saying essentially that he was glad for our presence at his museum, that we too were a part of the history represented inside the museum, and that it couldn't be more fitting to have us there for this occasion. He even requested that we donate our protest signs from the vigil to the museum's collection. After all, this vigil, the first of its kind organized at the museum, was historic.

Some weeks before our protest, I had the opportunity to visit the museum and see its new, very modern, very interactive and media savvy, exhibit. Some five million dollars were expended to build this monument to the glorious power of the atomic age, much of which was provided by the Department of Energy and Bechtel Nevada. Inside is a dynamic and appealing telling of the official narrative of the Nevada Test Site, including the personal stories of the brave patriots of the Cold War who kept our country safe from Communism by outbuilding and outsmarting the Soviets.

There is little, if any, detail of the human experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or of the human experience of those living downwind from the test blasts in the Pacific or here in our nation. And the protesters, well, let's just say their voice is not represented in the way they would probably choose. In the most extensive showing of the peoples' resistance movement to nuclear armament and testing, including video shots of thousands of people at the edge of the Test Site, vigiling and being arrested, the audio in the background is that of retired Bechtel employee saying 'I get so angry when I see those protesters. Don't they understand that the very thing they are protesting is what allows them the right to protest? And that's nuclear weapons.'

There was reason to organize a vigil presence at the official opening of the exhibit this past February. And there was reason to be surprised by the greeting we received from the museum's director. Having seen the museum, I could hardly agree to release our signs and

banners into his hands, but that was not to be the end of things. I asked Bill, somewhat leadingly, "It sounds like you would be willing and interested in a dialogue with us. How can I reach you?"

There were a few realities working on me simultaneously. First, the deep and expansive pain I felt for the museum's very existence, not dissimilar to having a museum honoring the efficiency and brilliance of the Nazi concentration camps. This pain was also experienced beyond the continued collective national arrogance and ignorance toward practices of systemic violence and narratives of domination that was embodied in this institution. I felt a pain too because I have little doubt that every single school child in the Las Vegas Valley will visit this museum at least once on a school field trip. If for no other reason than that there aren't that many museums in Las Vegas to visit and this one appears to be telling a history with global, national, and local significance. But the other reality at work in my heart was that this human being, Bill Johnson, was standing in front of me, smiling, holding out his business card, saying he looked forward to hearing from me. This reality too, had a power within it, the power of possibility, a tiny opening that might offer some opportunity for reconciliation and truth telling.

I returned home with these realities burdening my heart — the visceral anguish I was experiencing for this institution's existence and the imperative to engage the human element within it. I sat with the question, "Where can we go from here?" Not two weeks later, I received an email from the organizers of a Japanese peace delegation, who on their way to the United Nations in New York City for the Nonproliferation Treaty Conference, wanted to make the stop over in Las Vegas to see the Nevada Test Site. Their request was to be hosted by us and others involved in activism around the Test Site and nuclear issues. My reply was simple, "Of course we will be happy to meet with you during this stop, and will have no trouble finding those to accompany you to the Test Site." And then, "Have you heard of the Atomic Testing Museum?" I continued by writing a short description of the museum and made the

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request that if they were interested I would work on a way to have them visit the museum and perhaps more.

I quickly heard back that yes, there had been some coverage of the museum's opening in the Japanese media and they would be interested in visiting the museum and dialoguing with the museum's staff if that were possible. I had little to lose, so I found Bill's card and I picked up the phone. "Bill I have just heard from a group of seventy Japanese delegates concerned with issues of nuclear use and armament. Some of them are Hibakusha, survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. I would like to explore the possibility of bringing them to see the museum and give some input."

I tell this next part of the story only to note how far our relationship grew from these conversations, not to poke fun at Bill's position. Bill's initial response resembled, "Could we expect that they would pay the entrance fee?" The general entrance fee is \$10 and needless to say this was not where I would have anticipated our dialogue beginning. "Well, Bill, I don't know if that would be such a good approach. What I had in mind was that we would host them as honored guests, not like random tourists. I don't think I would feel comfortable bringing them to the museum without that intention." Bill, I would learn in the coming weeks, is a well studied anthropologist who wrote his graduate research in the field of "Cold War archeology." He is also quite reasonable.

Our conversation continued after Bill allowed that perhaps charging them to see the museum would not be appropriate. The idea that I was working on proposing was an evening event where the delegates would share some of their stories, infusing this piece of the history inside the museum's walls and then have an opportunity to see the museum and give some feed back. Along the way I used those magical words that every museum director likes to hear: "great media coverage for the museum." By the end of our initial conversation, something was moving.

A few hours later, Bill called me back. "Zac, I have been talking with members of the staff and board members of the foundation. I want to be really upfront with you — there is a lot of nervousness on our side of things." I could imagine there would be nervousness, so I said "That makes sense, let's talk about what is creating this nervousness." Bill conveyed very candidly

that there was widespread concern that this would turn into an anti-nuke rally and that that wouldn't be appropriate at the museum. I would guess that a lot of this concern was rooted in stigma related to who we, Nevada Desert Experience, are and the work that we have been doing for decades. "This event should be about these people and their stories. That will be enough. Let's let their stories speak for themselves." But then there was the bigger concern. Bill presented it plainly, "What about the Ground Zero Theater?"

The Ground Zero Theater is the museum's main attraction, built at the heart of the extensive exhibit. The small theater is constructed to look like a bunker, a small space with exposed concrete walls. As the lights fade to dark, a crackly intercom voice is heard overhead, "Ten, nine, eight, seven..." The dark is blindingly illuminated by the flash. As your eyes begin to adjust to the change in light, the first glimpse of a mushroom cloud's shape can be discerned on the viewing screen. While your eyes remain transfixed on the screen now showing billowing clouds of fire, your ears are inundated with an omnipresent rumbling. Then the wooden bench, on which you most assumingly placed yourself upon entering the theater, begins to vibrate under you. If not before, then certainly at this point your mind is seriously considering flight, but the experience has yet more in store. Just as the visuals of the radioactive cloud approach your seated position, air jets in the surrounding walls blow hot steam on your face and body. This is the Ground Zero Theater.

"What about the Ground Zero Theater, Bill?" Bill's answer changed whole understanding of what potentially existed in our relationship. His response touched the human nerve the museum utterly lacked. "Well, don't you think it might be inappropriate? Some of these delegates are survivors. Would something like this flip them out, or be offensive to them?" What was so dramatic about this line of questioning is that if you continue to follow it, the possibility that not just a few people with a certain lived experience would be injured by this, but that all of us with hearts filled with compassion and eyes tender to the care of our brothers and sisters and our beautiful earth, would all be hurt by this presentation. And of course, I hadn't brought it up. I was struck imagining how long it would have taken a bunch of activists to lobby the walls of this institution

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for this concern to be addressed, to see that question answered by those with the power to change it. And in this conversation, in that moment those with power to change it were asking me, the activist for answers.

Bill's initial idea was to close the Theater during their visit. But I wasn't about to help the museum hide from itself, not after our conversations had gotten this far. I proposed that we should inform the delegation about the Theater's presentation before hand and post a docent at the entrance to remind people of what awaited them. Transparency and disclosure, not assumption and withdrawal. From there, with those concerns discussed and resolved, the date was set and the planning of logistics began. On Wednesday April 27<sup>th</sup>, Nevada Desert Experience and the Nevada Test Site Historical Foundation would host a speaking event with seventy Japanese peace delegates at the Atomic Testing Museum.

The evening itself ran quite smoothly. A handful of press representatives joined the handful of museum staff members to listen to the three speakers: a doctor, a lawyer, and a mother, each sharing the atomic story of their lives. All but a few of the delegation spoke very little English so the evening proceeded with two tellings of everything - one in Japanese, and one in English.

The doctor shared the stories of his work with Hibakusha patients and some of the stories they had shared with him. The lawyer's work has been occupied with the struggle to receive recognition from the Japanese government for the second and third generation Hibakusha who also experience trauma and health effects from the radiation released by the bombings.

The mother shared the story of her father, a young man of 17 in Hiroshima 1945, who rarely talked of the experience. She shared stories of what it was like to live in fear that only Hibakusha know: the fear of the consequences of the legacy of radiation, the ever-present shadow of mysterious sickness and death. She told the story of a time when her son came to her with a nose-bleed — the first question that ran through her mind was, 'Is this small trickle of blood the first sign of leukemia?'

It was hard to comprehend the graciousness and care with which these stories were told to us, the Americans who have unleashed this terror and have done so little since then to ensure that such terror will

never be experienced again. At the end of their sharing, a small energetic man most excitedly presented the museum with a gift from the delegation: a collection of thirty poster-sized images from Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombings, including visuals of the physical devastation of the city and the intense human experience of the burns and other trauma of the victims. Members of the delegation held each of the pictures up at the front of the auditorium, offering them as a gift, something to be added to our consciousness.

After refreshments in the lobby, small groups began entering the museum. While the others waited for the next shift, many of them perused the gift shop which among other things, sells miniature replicas of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on key chains.

Some time later I joined a group of delegates for a viewing at the Ground Zero Theater. Before the start of the presentation, the docent came in to remind the viewers of what was about to come. "The Ground Zero Theater is a real life simulation," he said, "it's like you're really there." The young Japanese woman working as a translator turned to the group and spoke in Japanese. A question was asked, and she turned back to the docent to politely and seriously convey the question to him so that he could understand. "But no radiation, right?"

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*For the people of Japan, 60 years holds more significance than other jubilees kept by westerners. The Japanese believe it represents the completion of a generation. As the only victims of the A-bomb blasts, they determine that its memory and message must be handed on to future generations. May we too receive their wisdom and story, and not fail to pass it on to honor all Hibakusha in all generations.*

*Sr. Megan Rice*

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## **NDE wants to go Bio-Diesel**

If you have a diesel vehicle you are interested in donating or selling to us, please contact us at 702.646.4814 or [nde\\_program@peacenet.org](mailto:nde_program@peacenet.org)

# *NDE Presence for the NTP Review Conference, May 2005*

by

**Amy Schultz, Youth and Outreach Coordinator**

- 2005 is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US atomic bombings of Japan
- The mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki declared this a “year of remembrance and action”
- May 1<sup>st</sup> was a March and Rally in Central Park: “No War! No Nukes!”
- May 1-27: meeting of the United Nations Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), originally entered into force in 1970. The reviews occur every 5 years.
- Activities at the UN and local churches and colleges included interfaith prayer services, workshops, panel discussions, networking and various artistic and photographic exhibits

The setting was perfect - a warm and sunny spring day, walking through the streets of New York, past the United Nations, through midtown Manhattan and into Central Park. We marched on May 1<sup>st</sup>, the eve of the NPT Review Conference, with over 40,000 peace-makers, holding signs and banners, playing music, dancing and praying. Over a thousand Japanese delegates were present, helping us to recall our desire for a nuclear-free world. They offered handmade peace cranes; many wore Buddhist robes and played the Shinto drums. In Central Park, we heard live music and many speakers offer a vision of a peaceful and more secure world.

Almost always, I find that my travels and work with NDE are marked by relationships. While I learned new and useful things at the rally, the U.N. and the workshops, I was most impressed by the people I met along the way. I was hosted by the members of the NY Catholic Worker, a community that is an expert at hospitality and peace! During my short stay at St. Joseph House, I celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Catholic Worker Movement, and I met many powerful people - guests, volunteers and activists. The Catholic Workers are dedicated to working for peace and justice and living in voluntary poverty.

We had the chance to continue collaboration with other

anti-nuclear organizations, such as TriValley CAREs, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Western States Legal Foundation and Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance - meeting some activists for the first time in person.

I attended a workshop on depleted uranium (DU) and heard the story of one veteran of the First Gulf War who was exposed to DU. Now, she suffers immensely as her organs slowly begin to fail. The US government denies the dangers of DU to the human body and refuses to compensate its victims. The workshop was also a time for networking among the many people who are working to ban DU internationally.

During the May 1<sup>st</sup> Rally and the visits to the UN, I was moved by the Japanese representatives and peace activists we met. While looking at a photo exhibit of the devastation of Japan 60 years ago set in the UN lobby, several people approached us, wanting to know what we thought of the photos, why we were here. They were media, translators and Japanese citizens. We told them about our work in the desert, about nuclear testing and about the personal transformation that so often occurs in our work. Then, we had the privilege to hear from them - to listen to a Hibakusha (A-bomb survivor) tell his story of surviving “hell on earth” and why he is here 60 years later still doing the work of reconciliation and peacemaking. We hold the stories of the Hibakusha with care and respect and pray for peace.

Although my days in NYC were over, the delegates at the United Nations continued to meet until May 27. Unfortunately, the Review Conference of the NPT was not able to reach consensus for strengthening previous recommendations for disarmament. Although a signatory of the treaty, the United States continues noncompliance through its Stockpile Stewardship Program and talk of building new, more useable nuclear weapons. And yet, Article VI of the NPT clearly states: “Each of the parties to the treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to **nuclear disarmament** and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

## *August Desert Witness 2005*

### **Many stories, One Vision for a Nuclear-Free World**

Plans are well underway for the August Conference to be held in Las Vegas and at the Nevada Test Site from August 4-7. We will be having the conference on the campus of the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), which is located a couple miles from McCarran Airport and the southern end of the Las Vegas Strip. A registration form is included on page 7 of this newsletter for those who have not already registered.

Since the last newsletter was issued, we have confirmed the presence of several additional speakers including Frida Berrigan of the world Policy Institute; Darwin Bond-Graham, PhD candidate at U Cal Santa Barbara; John Burroughs from the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy; Jackie Cabasso and Andrew Lichterman from the Western States Legal Foundation; Michael Coffey from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation; Msgr. Ray East from the Office of Black Catholics for the Archdiocese of Washington DC; Corbin Harney, spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone Nation and founder of the Shundahai Network; Lisa Ledwidge of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research; Peggy Maze Johnson of Citizen Alert; Jonathan Parfrey from the LA Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility; Alan Senauke of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship; Anne Symens-Bucher from Nevada Desert Experience; and Dr Dina Titus, Professor at UNLV and Senate minority leader for the Nevada State Legislature.

The program will primarily be held in Las Vegas and we will go to the Test Site on Saturday evening, the anniversary of the Hiroshima Bombing. At the Test Site, we will have an opportunity to share stories with one another and witness a performance by Eth-Noh-Tec, before having our public witness at the entrance to the Test Site. As space allows during travel, participants are encouraged to bring portable chairs, blankets, or pillows to sit on the ground.

We are looking for 60 volunteers to assist in the evening performance. Details of this volunteer activity can be found at our website [www.NevadaDesertExperience.org](http://www.NevadaDesertExperience.org).

## *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 - Creating 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
- Noon 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**

- 5.00 am Optional Sunrise Ceremony at Test Site
- 8.00 am Breakfast
- 9.30 am Religious services / Public witness in Vegas
- 11.00 am "Next Steps in Movement Building"
- Noon Closing Ceremony
  - ~ Omega West Dance Company
- 1.00 pm Lunch

# 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](http://www.NevadaDesertExperience.org)  
Hard copies of the form may be requested by calling the Nevada Desert Experience Office.

## Registration

Registration \$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 6 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  
Las Vegas NV 89114***

Nonprofit Organization

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# ***August Desert Witness 2005***

## ***August 4-7, 2005***

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

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

***Sponsored by***

***Nevada Desert Experience and Pax Christi USA***

***See page 6 for More Information***