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

Interview with Anthony Guzman, Chelsea Collonge, Amy Schultz, Kathryn Dillon, and Patrick Finn NDE Immersion Group

January 13, 2006
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

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

Suzanne Becker: *Go ahead and begin.*

Anthony Guzman: My name is Tony Guzman. I was born and raised in San Francisco, California. I've been living in Las Vegas for about a year and a half now, and currently I am the Outreach Coordinator for Citizen Alert. Citizen Alert is an environmental justice organization that's been in the state of Nevada for about thirty years now, and we've been working primarily on one issue but we focus a lot on the Nevada Test Site [NTS] along with Yucca Mountain and other environmental justice issues.

The way I became interested in nuclear issues, so to speak, is not by accident, but when I moved here a year and a half ago, I realized I wanted to get involved. I had just graduated from college, so I really wanted to get involved in the community, and I realized that one of, if not the most important issue in the community as well as the state was the Yucca Mountain Project, and I literally just started to learn about it. I was fascinated by it. I didn't know anything about it, growing up in California, and I learned more and I really was, in a sense, inspired to do something about it, I guess. And I contacted Citizen Alert in the summer of 2004 and said, How can I help? What can I do? And I began volunteering, helping with some projects, just there every day and [I] immersed myself in the issue. The more I learned about nuclear waste politics, the Nevada Test Site, and nuclear weapons, I was just so fascinated by it.

Literally the rest is history. I've been with the organization now for more than a year, doing different projects. My current focus is youth organizing, student organizing, and raising awareness at primarily the university level but also hopefully eventually high school level, getting young people in this movement. A lot of times we go to events and conferences and there's mostly older people and not younger people at these events. I think the antinuclear and nuclear abolition movement needs new voices, new ideas, and young people to be active, because it's an ongoing legacy and who's going to take that role in the future? So that's my focus and I really just—I feel almost like I committed my life to it because it's so amazing and such a powerful thing.

Can you describe a little more? You said you were really fascinated with it. What was the fascinating thing that got you into it?

I think part of it was I moved to Nevada not knowing anything about Nevada, in a sense. I mean, and I didn't realize how much—I mean I was a history major.

OK. I was going to ask you what you studied. Did you learn about the Cold War era and the test site or anything like in your classes?

It was a U.S. History focus and I focused on constitutional history, so we didn't talk a lot about nuclear and Cold War. I learned a lot about World War II, but I didn't know Nevada's role specifically in the testing of nuclear weapons. And then specifically when I had learned about Yucca Mountain, I didn't know about the role that nuclear power has in this country, as well as nuclear waste, and how that affects not just Nevada but the whole country. So that's when I said, wow, Nevada has a legacy. I was fascinated by the historical perspective, as a history guy, and then I was interested in how this is so current. Yucca Mountain, in 2004 it was *the* issue here, I mean in the election, the presidential election and all that. So I just was like, this is it. Right after

you graduate, you don't know what you're going to do and you don't know where you're going to go and I was like, wow, this is what I want to do. So that's what inspired me.

That's cool.

Yeah. So that's sort of my story.

Great. Starting with some introductions, so Chelsea, [do] you want to—?

Chelsea Collonge: I'm Chelsea Collonge. I'm twenty-one years old and currently a fourth-year senior at UC [University of California] Berkeley. I'm studying Peace and Conflict Studies with a focus in nonviolence. And I'm from San José, California. Two years ago, I was at office hours of my nonviolence professor when Amy Schultz came in and sat down next to me, waiting to speak to my professor. [She] gave me a brochure about this immersion trip that she was organizing to take students out to the Nevada Test Site to learn about nuclear weapons testing **[00:05:00]** from a variety of angles—from the peace and justice angle, which was my primary interest, but also the environmental and the indigenous rights issues, or angles. And the main reason that I went out is because I have been raised Catholic and it was Lent, and spending Lent in the desert at a time when I was really searching spiritually had a great appeal for me. So I came out on that immersion trip, and since that time have gotten very involved with antinuclear activism. I've interned with several antinuclear organizations in the Bay Area and also gotten really involved with a student movement to have the UC sever its ties with the nuclear weapons labs, the University California which manages Los Alamos [National Laboratory] and [Lawrence] Livermore [National Laboratory] labs. So now I'm here again in Las Vegas for the same kind of immersion trip, and I've now been working part-time for Nevada Desert Experience [NDE] for about three months.

OK. And you got involved with the Nevada Desert Experience after coming out here and meeting Amy and doing the trip last year?

Yes.

OK. Cool. All right. Go ahead, [Amy].

Amy Schultz: My name is Amy Schultz and I am twenty-nine years old, almost thirty, and I currently am the Director of the Nevada Desert Experience. I work from a Bay Area office. I was born and raised in Florida and four years ago moved out to California to the Bay Area to start graduate school. I got a master's in ministry. While I was there, I was speaking to one of my professors about getting involved in the community and I was explaining to him my interests and my passions for being involved in peace and justice work and environmental justice work and specifically from a faith-based perspective, and he suggested that I meet with Anne Symens-Bucher who's one of the co-founders of the Nevada Desert Experience. So I went to meet with her and help her with her work that she does for the Franciscans. That was in my first year of graduate school. When I was getting ready to graduate, NDE had a little bit more funding than we usually have and offered me the position to be, at the time, Youth and Outreach Coordinator. So this is my third year working for NDE. Basically we're very small-staffed, as you know, and currently just trying to organize different events of introducing people to the issues and inviting people to come out to the desert for a different kind of experience and the opportunity to learn about the issues.

Was there anything specific that sparked your interest in this particular area?

Well, it's interesting because I didn't really know very much at all about the nuclear issue. I had grown up in the seventies and eighties and certainly had consciousness, this is still during the Cold War, and I remember being really scared of being bombed and all of that, but it was never

really any of the focuses of my earlier activism. I think just through my experience of working with Anne. Then she suggested that I come out to one of our [NDE's] events to see if it was something that fit with me, and I did. I came out for the end of our annual Peace Walk out to the test site and spent a night in the desert with a huge thunderstorm and the next day got arrested for the first time, and it was just a really powerful experience. Then [I] got more and more exposed to the people involved. I think that's been one of the most amazing things about this job, just meeting the different people who have either worked with or for NDE or all of our sister organizations or organizations we collaborate with, and also the people who come to our events. How inspiring. And I think it matched what I was looking for, in that it's an organization that works for peace and justice, even **[00:10:00]** though it has a particular bent on the nuclear issue. But we try to incorporate what's called the justice, peace, integrity of creation, all the elements, and doing that from a base of being of faith. That was really important to me and that's why it met all of those needs at the time.

Wow. Great.

Kathryn Dillon: My name is Kate Dillon. I am a sophomore at UC Berkeley and I am studying Peace and Conflict Studies. I first became real aware of this issue through my classes, and really I'm here on this trip, on this immersion experience in order to better understand the issue. It's been so fascinating this week to get to better understand it in such a real sense, in talking with people who are affected, who live so nearby and so locally, and to get to see the site itself and go to the [Atomic Testing] museum. It's one thing to learn about these things in the classroom and it's another thing to actually get to see it all and see its effects. I found out about the trip because of my friendship with Chelsea, so I'm grateful for all of that.

Have you been out here before or this is your first time?

No, this is actually my very first time even in Las Vegas, so it's been quite a week.

I bet. Well, actually that brings me—I don't want to cut you off.

No, that's fine.

Well, that just brings me to another question [which] is, now that you guys have all been out to the test site at least once, I'm wondering if you recall what your first thoughts or first impressions were when you got out there, what you were thinking about.

Chelsea Collonge: Something that stands out really strongly in my memory [is] when I went on the immersion trip two years ago. We went out to the test site on the last day for a vigil, and we gathered off the side of the road and did something called the Mirror Walk, which is where we paired up and I closed my eyes and my partner gently led me to walk through the rocky landscape and then stopped and said, `Chelsea, open your eyes and look in the mirror.` And I did and I was standing right in front of this most amazingly beautiful bush. Just being exposed to the beauty, the subtle but just profound beauty of that landscape really stuck out to me, especially because of what I had learned about 1951 and the opening of the test site, there are government documents that say, Nevada, just desolate landscape, good for nothing but disposing of your used razor blades. Coming from California, I wasn't expecting to be blown away by the richness of the desert, but it became definitely a home for me.

Amy Schultz: I would say a very similar experience. Like I said, the first time I went out there was for a part of the Peace Walk, so I had not done the whole walk, which is over five days, but just the last night. And it was this crazy thunderstorm in the middle of the desert. I woke up the next morning and it was just so beautiful and fresh and the wind was so strong. It was just really beautiful. And to be there and to know that just a couple miles away there was this immense destruction going on and that had been going on for so many years, and that image

of the Earth as the Mother, knowing that since 1962 we'd been doing the bombing underground, and that image of in the womb kind of thing, I think that's really striking. It was striking to me, that meaning.

Kathryn Dillon: We drove up there, was that yesterday? Yesterday afternoon. And it was **[00:15:00]** late afternoon and so the sun was starting to set and I was just already so in awe. All week I have been in awe of the amazing beauty of the desert here, especially Red Rock Park but all over the desert. It's just gorgeous! And so I was thinking about that. I was also thinking at the same time as I looked out towards the gate and in towards the site, which I'd learned at the [Atomic Testing] museum a few days before was a larger area than the state of Rhode Island. I was trying to picture that in my head and I couldn't, how immense that would be, extending way far beyond what I could see. And I was thinking about something Chelsea had told me. She actually sent me a message when she was there over summer saying, I'm thinking of you and looking out at the stars at the most heavily bombed place on Earth. So those are some of the things I was thinking about as I was remembering her comment about that, and just soaking in this immense beauty and looking at this place that has been so incredibly destructed. Those were some of my first thoughts as we arrived there.

Anthony Guzman: I had similar thoughts because the one time I went to the test site, my first experience, I took a Yucca Mountain tour. Obviously you get to go within the test site, and primarily it was at Yucca Mountain, but they actually take you on top of Yucca Mountain on a road and you stop and the tour guides talk about the desert and the Nevada Test Site and stuff. And you get on top of Yucca Mountain and you see 360-degrees, you get a look all the way around, and it is, it's incredibly beautiful. It's an amazing experience. And I was pissed off; I was angry because this is what they're doing to it. I mean I was standing above Yucca Mountain

where they're planning to bury the most deadly substance in the world and I'm looking out at the test site where they have all these terrible weapons tests. So I was angry, I guess. That was my reaction. My gut reaction was anger that they're doing this. And it was capped off because our two tour guides—one guy was a geologist at the Project and the other guy worked for Bechtel [Nevada]. He was a PR guy, and he started on this little—

Do you remember who they were, by chance?

Not by name, no. I recognize their faces, though. I see them around. They always show up at these hearings and meetings and sit in the back corner. But that's a different story. So the guy from Bechtel, the PR guy, started talking about all the great things that Bechtel does for the state and he said, `We do these great things for the native people`, and he's like, `I don't remember their name but I know they're really grateful for all the things we do for them.` And me and another guy, we're like, `Excuse me. By the way, it's the Western Shoshone people, and I don't think they're really grateful for what you're doing.` And everybody else besides me, there were three people from Citizen Alert, everybody else had no idea about Yucca Mountain—were a load of fresh people. And just the look on this guy's face when he's trying to sell something, I guess market the Yucca Mountain Project and how great—Bechtel does these things for the community, they donate money to schools, all this stuff—my reaction was just anger and like, how dare you; how dare you say this? So it's pretty amazing.

It sounds like you all had pretty powerful reactions to it. So many things going through my head. Before we continue on, I'm curious to know how—maybe one of you could clarify for historical or technical purposes the relation—because you guys are all out of Berkeley. And [Tony] you're not but you're involved in Citizen Alert here, but it seems like there is this affiliation between

here, Las Vegas, the group, and then what you guys do at Berkeley. Do you know the history of this or can you explain that?

Amy Schultz: I think I could go into a little bit about that. When NDE was founded twenty-five years ago [1982, originally the Lenten Desert Experience], two of the co-founders were based out of the Bay Area [Anne Symens-Bucher and Michael Affleck]. They were either **[00:20:00]** Franciscans or involved in the Catholic Worker movement in the Bay Area. So I think from its inception, there has always been that connection and that's why right now we have an office there and an office here. But I think it's also because, California in general seems to be a fairly ripe place for bringing people over, and in fact a lot of our events, we have people from all over California.

Are you Nevada Desert Experience out there also?

Yes.

OK. And so you do events out there, as well.

We mainly organize events to come here. It's a little bit confusing because we're Nevada Desert Experience in California.

Well, that soon will be one state.

That's true. We will have some fundraising events in California and we'll do outreach, like go to high schools or colleges and do different talks. We've also seen that Los Angeles is a really good recruitment area because it's so close. You know it's only four hours away and people see this as kind of their backyard, I think, and relate to the issue more. I guess, the history, there's always been a lot of people who come out for events.

Do you find that there's a lot of awareness like on campus about the issue even of nuclear waste, nuclear weapons, nuclear testing, the test site, Yucca Mountain? Do you find that there's an awareness?

Chelsea Collonge: I can speak just about University of California. I'm part of a statewide student group called the Coalition to Demilitarize the UC. And we make classroom announcements and often start out by asking, `Please raise your hand if you are aware that every single nuclear weapon in the U.S. arsenal was designed by a UC employee.` And usually out of a classroom of fifty to two hundred people, we'll get three or less raising their hands. I think a big reason for that is that students in general are really unaware of the nuclear danger that we still face. In university right now, we're all post-Cold War kids. We came to consciousness after the end of the Cold War and no longer see nuclear weapons as a problem, or if we do it's so overshadowed by corporate globalization and imperialistic wars that we're seeing. You could probably talk more about Nevada. [Speaking to Anthony]

Anthony Guzman: Oh, absolutely.

Yes, particularly at UNLV [University of Nevada Las Vegas].

At UNLV, [and] I think in Nevada in general, you say the word Yucca Mountain, everybody knows. It's in the news at least once a week. I'll even say people that move here, if they're here a few months, by then they've heard of Yucca Mountain and know at least the very basics. So even at UNLV, there is a lot of knowledge, very basic knowledge of what Yucca Mountain is.

The test site is a little bit different. I think people don't realize that it's still operating. They might think of it as in the past, so it's hard. I focus a lot of my organizing on Yucca Mountain because there is that awareness already. It's easier, and my hope eventually is to say, look, the issues are connected; we shouldn't separate Yucca Mountain and the test site.

But I think there is some knowledge. Is there activism? I guess that's a different question, but there is knowledge, and I think the knowledge with Yucca Mountain, people realize it. A lot of people think it's already open. A lot of people think that there is already waste there, that it's already approved, that they thought it was a done deal years ago. So a lot of the work is trying to say, look, it's not even licensed yet, it's not even built yet. It's saying, this is something we can fight, we can keep fighting. My organization has been fighting, along with other people, for thirty years, so if we keep the fight going, we can stop it now. So, yeah, there is that awareness, I would say.

[00:25:00] Chelsea Collonge: I think the nature of nuclear weapons is that they're so awesomely scary and so overwhelming, the magnitude of destruction that they can cause, that it's really hard to think about them. It's really hard to want to keep them in your consciousness. I feel like coming out to the test site and experiencing it in a spiritual way really opened a space of hope and sustainability inside of me, where I could then go back and start reading up on the issue. And, yes, get freaked out, but not have it be so intense that it shut me down. And I have to say that coming back to the test site this week was a lot different than the first time because in the past two years I've learned a lot about the subcritical testing happening at the test site. I've learned about stockpile stewardship and management and how those subcritical tests provide data that they can then put into supercomputers in order to design new and modified nuclear weapons, which the [George W.] Bush Administration has plans to use against countries around the world. Having that technical knowledge and that understanding of our current foreign policy made being at the test site an even more powerful experience because I understood, it's not only that this land was stolen and destructed and polluted, but also that it was used to advance this tool of domination and extreme violence. That is still a key part of U.S. foreign policy today.

It's interesting what you say because I think that the general awareness of people ends at the fact that, well, we don't do nuclear testing anymore. A lot of people know that there was a moratorium in 1992 so they think that, well, this doesn't happen anymore, [and] they're always surprised to hear that people still go up to the test site to do actions. But I don't think a majority of the population is aware that the things that still go on are just different, sort of new tools for new times. So does that play a role in keeping you guys inspired to do what you're doing?

Kathryn Dillon: To go back to the students' role and something that Chelsea had talked about, about how it can be really scary or overwhelming to talk about nuclear weapons, I think often a lot of what I have seen is students, or anyone, this is not just limited to students, but a desire to simply accept the history that they have been taught: that nuclear weapons ended World War II and they helped us be victorious in the Cold War and now look at all these countries involved in nuclear weapons around the world currently, it's so important that we continue to maintain our stockpile, period. Without really critically examining both that history and the current situation internationally today. And I think both of those things are so important to do and yet there's very little effort made towards either of those.

Chelsea Collonge: Yes, very little academic space, as well, because political science is still dominated by realist political theory that talks about deterrence and talks about an international scene of aggressive states that can't cooperate. So I feel like I've been amazingly blessed at UC Berkeley to be part of an alternative department that talks about international relations from a more hopeful perspective, and Kate's part of that also, that major. Because the truth is, if you think something is real, it's real in its consequences. If we think that we can make peace, then we have a chance to, but if we think that peace is impossible and we're always going to need nuclear weapons, then that is going to turn into fact. And we really encountered that talking to the

Director of the Atomic Testing Museum [William Johnson]. He was courageously open with us **[00:30:00]** and expressed his view that nuclear weapons are a fact and that human beings do not give up weapons until they develop a more powerful one. And I could see how you would think that, looking at human history, but if we don't challenge that assumption, then we're doomed to have it become a fact, I think.

Kathryn Dillon: I feel like so often this critical examination is looked upon by others, or our point of view is so often just dismissed as too optimistic. I think that it's so important that people look at it step by step and see that we're not saying we think that all of a sudden the United States should completely and entirely stop 100 percent of its production of nuclear weapons and dismantle all existing ones. That's not realistic and we recognize that and I think—but instead—I don't know if this is something you want to be getting into—

Yes, absolutely.

Instead of looking at things, like the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which several key countries have signed onto, but not including the United States, I feel that we just need to approach this from an international point of view in which we all can work towards this and look towards this together with cooperation and see that the existence of these weapons is ridiculous! If it ever comes to nuclear warfare, the world will be destroyed. Their very existence is so indescribably destructive, not only in their creation and in their maintenance but of course in their possible use, and so that horrifying idea.

Well, perhaps a flip side to that, how would you respond to somebody saying, well, but because we have these weapons, the world hasn't been destroyed yet and they are necessary to maintain the peace that we've had up through now. Because I think that's the alternative perspective, that they are necessary.

Kathryn Dillon: I would say that we can't look at this short last few decades in order to determine by saying, oh, they've been necessary, and yet they haven't been used, I don't feel like that is an accurate or a very thorough way to look at the situation. Instead, I think—how do I want to phrase this?

Chelsea Collonge: I would try to take a second to empathize with them and reflect back what I heard and let them know I'm listening, and then I'd probably ask them a little bit about—so what's your definition of peace? Is peace spending billions of dollars on the military-industrial complex while underfunding human needs in this country? Is it destroying the environment? And I would also challenge them to look at all the times during the Cold War when we irradiated our own citizens and also came very close to either nuclear war or nuclear accident, a risk that is magnified today with terrorism and also the dramatic proliferation of nuclear weapons that we've been seeing over the past, I guess, eight years. I would challenge them to examine how the United States, possessing such an overwhelming nuclear arsenal, actually makes us less safe because it makes other countries afraid for their safety and it makes them, other countries, want to pursue nuclear weapons development in order to have their own deterrent. With that kind of escalating proliferation, no one is going to be safe. So just sort of inviting people to recognize that security in a globalized world is necessarily **[00:35:00]** interdependent and that we can't try to protect ourselves with these huge fences or these huge weapons because there are too many holes and too many risks.

Anthony Guzman: What I would say to those people, I would make the argument, and believe me, I get that a lot, I would ask them to ask the Western Shoshone if those weapons are needed. Or the Marshallese. All the tests, were they justified because they've never been used in warfare? But any weapons test is an act of war against somebody, because there's Downwinders, people

that are suffering from that. I would ask the people living in Hanford, Washington on the Columbia River; on the Savannah River site in Georgia; Rocky Flats in Denver, all these people living near weapons facilities are suffering the effects of the Cold War and weapons production. And ask them, is it justified to have these weapons? I mean on top of all that, on top of the militarism, on top of the threats, the living two to three minutes from nuclear holocaust, is that history which continues to this day—it's not history, it's living, people are still being contaminated at these sites—is that justified? That's the question I would ask them. It's a rhetorical question, in my opinion, but that's the challenge I would ask them.

Kathryn Dillon: I feel like the nuclear weapons issue is one example, one symptom or one way in which we can see the larger issue or the connected issue of the attitude of the United States towards international relations today, in general, and the self-absorption and lack of cooperation which is not creating peace.

Given this conversation that we've just had, I'm curious how you all see the role of actions at the test site and what you guys do now at the test site. Has it shifted over the years? Do you see it holding a different purpose now than it did maybe in 1982 or in 1984? I don't mean to ask a compound question, I'm just wondering. We've talked about how our use of nuclear weapons and development of nuclear weapons have evolved and how our understanding of it has evolved. How do you see the work that you do as having evolved over the past couple of decades, if it has?

Amy Schultz: Well, I think at the beginning of this campaign, there was a lot more clarity, maybe, on short-term goals. The first ten years of the campaign, there was really a goal to get the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty signed and to have that enacted. Even though the overall goal was always stopping nuclear weapons testing worldwide and nuclear abolition worldwide,

but it was a more concrete, short-term goal. Since then, I'd say that [it] remains nuclear abolition in general, but specifically trying to raise awareness about what's still going on and how it fits into what Chelsea was talking about, just like imperial warfare and colonialism and our current foreign policy. And how that also relates to some of the other things that we've seen this week, like inner-city poverty, homelessness and destruction of the environment. But I think the consistent, besides nuclear abolition, has also been the campaign of nonviolence and also trying to offer a space for what **[00:40:00]** we call "personal conversion," or a personal experience in the desert, in whatever form that might take. It might be just an awareness of the things that they didn't know before they came out to the test site or to one of our events, or it could be a spiritual experience. But I think pretty consistently, in talking to people who've worked for Nevada Desert Experience in the past and then through my own experience, I've heard people say, "this has changed my life," which sometimes seems hard for me to believe, but you know it's changed my own life. It might have inspired them to get involved, maybe not in the nuclear issue but in another issue or to be more deeply grounded in whatever they do.

It sounds like even still the firsthand experience is a pretty important component to bringing about awareness, creating change, personal and political.

Patrick Finn: I think absolutely. Chelsea spoke about this earlier, about opening a space of hope in coming out to the test site, in a sense opening a crack that allows you to walk into an issue that's really overwhelming. I mean absolutely overwhelming when we're talking about world destruction, or we're talking about slowly poisoning ourselves to the point of nonexistence. And so in some senses I feel like, in my experiences out at the test site, I think that that idea of opening a space is very accurate for what really happens, and that doesn't happen anywhere. I don't want to say that it doesn't happen anywhere else, but you need that and you

need that in first-hand experience to even really start engaging in any constructive, peaceful and holistic approach to addressing our current global situation and our current human condition. In my experience, that has been opening a space of—Chelsea said opening a space of hope. For me, it's been opening a space to grieve in many ways that I don't allow myself to grieve or I don't know how to grieve. When you're out there and you're aware that everything around you has witnessed a hundred atmospheric atomic explosions and has been poisoned by over a thousand atomic explosions and everything's been pelted by radiation, you're being pelted by radiation as you speak, to be out there and to understand that puts you in a place of vulnerability that allows you to sort of let go. I guess in some ways it's a contradiction because your defense mechanisms that don't allow you to grieve are because you're feeling vulnerable. But out there you just recognize your own helplessness. Every time I go out there, I end up grieving about some other situation in my life that I hadn't allowed myself to feel and to experience and to get in touch with. The first time I went out there, I broke down over the situation between my father and my grandmother who's developed dementia and has gone blind. And totally unexpected. And still, yesterday when I went out there, I mean the same sort of feelings about—I guess, bringing it together, I think that Chelsea's idea of opening a space, coming out to the test site and having that experience provides something that just isn't found in ordinary life, no matter how much you think about it. I think in some ways it has to do with vulnerability and helplessness.

[00:45:00] *Right, and it sounds like almost because—you guys have all mentioned —I mean we as humans suppress these incredibly overwhelming facts about our lives or I think we'd never be able to function, and nuclear weapons and nuclear destruction is certainly one of, I think, the most prominent. You have all talked about that, so what I hear you saying is that you almost*

have to confront this, head-on, when you're out there. And yes—definitely opens it up to vulnerability, which I guess I never thought of, and that's interesting. It's very powerful.

Just to shift gears briefly for a minute, I wanted to ask you guys, you're all very politically aware and active, and I'm wondering two things. Did you grow up with any kind of influences [in] your family—any kind of activist roots there? And particularly for Chelsea and Amy and Kate and Patrick, you three have all mentioned also an intertwining with spirituality and your faith. So I guess I'm wondering what role that has played, then, in getting to where you are now? Maybe you just want to go around the room. Did you guys grow up in a family where there was activism?

Anthony Guzman: Oh, yes. My parents were extremely active. They were revolutionary Communists actually during the sixties. Yes, I know. My dad lived underground for a while, but anyway. Yes, I grew up and it was just so natural to be active and to understand the need for social justice. And so I guess it was normal. I sort of went through a transition, through high school and even most of college actually, even though I went to San Francisco State, I was apolitical. I rebelled, I guess, in a weird way. I didn't want to be. Which is weird because I was a history major and I learned all this stuff and I was like, I can't do it, I don't have the energy, I don't want to do it. I knew too much in a way, which sounds weird. And it was weird because when I graduated in 2004 and I moved here literally a month after, I said, I can't live here without being active. I see Las Vegas for what it is. I just had moved here but I saw what was going on here and I started learning about Yucca Mountain and nuclear issues. I'm like, I can't not be active, it's who I am. And that's what inspired me to become active, finally. But it took a while and it took being non-active to being active for me to do that transition, and so I love it. This is what I do now. That's the way I live.

Chelsea, how about you?

Chelsea Collonge: Well, I have five parents because they've divorced a lot. My fathers are all pretty conservative, and then my mom is quite liberal and she has had the most grip on me, so growing up I felt staunchly Democrat, except for that one time in third grade when I read an essay—this was during the Gulf War—about how we should just assassinate Saddam Hussein. Oh, and also how we should execute people who smoke. So I went through a whole bunch of pretty hard-core views. [some words unclear due to overlapping voices mixed with group laughter]. I went through my Fascist stage. So I think that what really led me to where I am today is in high school, getting involved in the Catholic Church and learning about Catholic social teaching through a youth group. And then going home and talking about it with my mom and her also being a person of faith and a liberal person—just having that affirmed in my home.

About the role of spirituality in this work that we do here in Nevada, I've **[00:50:00]** actually had lots of interesting conversations this week about that. Last night we were talking about this question of, are we doing this for God? What does it mean to do something for God? And is that right? Is that a just and a healthy way to conceptualize this? And is that what God would want? I think for me spirituality or ideas about God are just solely a way of getting in touch with feelings of love and the ability to act according to love, and that is what brings me out here. Like love for this land.

So that definitely translates into the work that you do.

Yes. And love for people, and my desire for people to be safe and to be healthy. And it's really hard to try to extend that to the workers at the test site. Of course that's a huge goal in coming out there for me, to try to push those boundaries of compassion out as far as possible. But it's just so hard for me to be out there at the gates and be having this experience, and then workers

are coming in and out of the gates and seeing it in such a different way. It's hard to get my mind around that.

So they're seeing the experience, the test site, what you guys are doing, in a very different way?

Yes, the land and being in that place has a much different meaning for them. We all have a right to be there but I'm from California, like I'm an outsider coming in for a day. And for me, the civil disobedience is really important because I feel that the government tries really hard to keep us away from places of violence and secrecy, and that going there is important to unveil the truth about how our society is working. So I'm glad that I go out there, but I can see myself in the workers' eyes and see how I am really an outsider and that this place has a spiritual meaning for me but not a day-to-day meaning, and it's so important in their day-to-day lives. I really want to cultivate my respect for that.

Interesting. Amy, do you have thoughts on this?

Amy Schultz: A little bit. I wouldn't say I was raised in an activist family but definitely a family that was supportive and nurturing of especially creation as in nature, and so I think I always had a strong inclination towards environmental justice. And also a general sense of justice. Like Chelsea, when I was in high school, just being exposed to the service projects and stuff like that, I became more aware. Then in college, I became much more active, particularly again through the Catholic peace movement, especially a group called Pax Christi. They work on a variety of issues, so it was really just general social justice and peacemaking. That's continued to be fostered throughout my life and doing different things. I'd say it definitely plays a part in this work and why I'm doing this work. I'm not sure I know or can articulate fully why but I think, coming from the Catholic tradition, there's a strong Catholic social teaching in a lot of things, so through that tradition, and then also the Gospels. I kind of feel like it's a mandate as a

Christian to pursue a more peaceful and loving existence and to bring that forth on Earth. I also find that doing it from this kind of **[00:55:00]** base or grounding also is more grounding and provides inspiration in ways that I—I can't speak from the perspective of a secular activist or a community activist or I don't know what you want to call it, but I've heard through other people's experiences that they might experience burnout more easily because there's not as much source of inspiration. I'm not really sure, but that's something new.

Interesting.

Kathryn Dillon: The home that I grew up in was incredibly full of compassion, both within our family and outwardly as well. I suppose I'm trying to think of how to describe this, because my parents definitely weren't political activists but they were active in the church and in the community.

Right. And I guess I don't particularly mean political activist, but open to—there are many forms of activism.

Right. So that's more the form that they took, which was on a much more local and personal scale. But it was felt very powerfully by me. But then again, like these other ladies, during high school and during some service projects is when I really started to—I felt something very strong inside of me and I felt like that kind of work is what I wanted to do with my whole life. And because of my religion as a Christian, I felt like I could place that passion within a calling or within something having to do with that faith, Then last year, in my first year at school, I started to go through a lot of doubting with my faith and started to question a lot of at the core of, well, who am I, what is my identity, what is it that I want to do with my life and how do I explain this passion that I feel if I'm not able to explain it within the context of my religion? That's been an exploration process I've been going through for about the last year and really trying to better

understand what I feel inside of me and what I believe on a spiritual level. And this week has been indescribable towards my better understanding of those things.

Patrick, did you want to add anything to that?

Patrick Finn: I don't really know. I don't know. In some ways, I'm still wondering. I mean looking at your own personal formation and realizing how you don't recall, even when you're an adult, what's brought you to make the decisions that [you have]. You can't recall the decision processes that went through your mind that brought you to make this decision in order to choose to hold an awareness, compared to something else.

Although often there will be one or two pivotal things that come up that move you, get you motivated or move you to the next level, really impact a decision that you make.

Well, I look at my parents and my parents were not—my mother was at a time, but subsequently, I guess as she became a mother, stepped away from that.

I mean I think it's interesting because you mentioned there is a community-based or a secular activism and then I've talked to a lot of people that have very **[01:00:00]** *much a faith-based activism and it gets expressed a little bit differently. So I was curious as to the roles that that plays for people. It's pretty powerful, it seems like.*

I know you guys have to prepare dinner. I don't know what your time frame is like, so it's up to you. We can wrap it up and maybe if you have any last things to say or maybe there's something that we didn't cover that you feel is important to this piece, to your story—

Kathryn Dillon: I've been thinking about one thing because, gosh, this has felt very natural and very much like a conversation. But then I start to think in my head about, when that's written down, it may look so much more different. I feel like I'm so much less articulate verbally than I am written.

You'd be surprised when you read it. I mean in a good way.

OK. But there's one thing that stuck in my head. It's something that I feel like was not very well explained and could be misinterpreted, and that was one of the last things I said about the United States and how I feel like a lot of the attitude internationally of arrogance or self-absorption, and I want to say that but I want to say that with also the understanding that I am trying to better understand that viewpoint. I'm trying to understand the idea. I understand that a lot of people feel like that is the best way to keep not only our country secure but a lot of the world secure so that we can be strong and we can help out those who need us and we can keep power away from those who shouldn't have it and who are misusing the power that they do have. And I just feel like that reality isn't working. I feel like we need to look at new options.

Patrick Finn: I was thinking of something. When you asked the question of, do we draw inspiration from the fact that so many people don't have the nuclear issue in their awareness? And that to bring information about an issue that has so much secrecy surrounding it, and that is a very prominent issue that nobody's really thinking about anymore. Especially as young people are post-Cold War, and nuclear warfare is not necessarily in the mind, I think in some senses yes. I mean absolutely in the sense that informing the populace will have a tremendous impact, but this also undercuts in some ways—I can relate it behind the Nevada Desert Experience's refocusing on transforming relationships and not just having a focus on awareness or that's very important. Because, even with my dear friends, I mean people our age but a lot of folks who believe that the nuclear issue is dead, and you'll present them with facts and say, you know, the Pentagon is shelling out as much money now for nuclear development as it was at the height of the Cold War, almost.

Anthony Guzman: More. More now.

Patrick Finn: Yes. And we're continuing to develop more destructive nuclear weapons and more usable nuclear weapons. This is really still a hot issue, and the response can often be, "yeah, yeah, of course." You know? It's sort of like, yes, I bet we are, you know, we're pretty screwed up.

So people are just resigned to it.

And Chelsea opened this up to me, sort of like a self-preserving pessimism. And that's **[01:05:00]** pervasive. I think that's the tremendous apathy that we find in my peers and people I care about and I really want to get involved in this issue. I mean there's the time when you really draw inspiration from getting information to people who are going to take that and run with it, but that can be undercut. There's also something very profound that has to be addressed, and that's raising people to care. How do you do that? And that's really to care about another person, to care about themselves in a holistic way, to care about community, to care about these things. And that's harder to get excited about and that's harder to be inspired about but that's really. The like, all right, let's go get people in forum, let's get people involved, that only goes so far. You sort of need that.

Right. It goes beyond disseminating the factual information.

Patrick Finn: Yes**.** I remember when I first started learning about this stuff. I was like, there aren't enough people out there. Your mind gets blown. [You think] no, we've got to do something: let's start changing our lives, let's change other lives. But that's not everybody, and certainly it's not my response to everything. Planting those seeds are really, really important but I don't think that that—I don't draw my inspiration from that, I guess.

I guess it goes back to what you guys have been talking about, that it's just this amazingly overwhelming thing that is hard to comprehend. I think that's where you find some of the apathy,

where people just sort of agree and say yeah, we're spending a lot of money. To actually think about it, like you guys have been saying, is pretty overwhelming.

Patrick Finn: People just accepting the system as rotten, and they find out about nuclear weapons.

Chelsea Collonge: I think one thing that's been missing that I would like to add is in NDE we've thought a lot about the tension between faith and strategy. In many ways I feel like when I'm in activist mode, wearing my NDE hat, I'm not acting in an instrumental fashion. I'm not out there trying to make anything happen. One of my friends at Berkeley is an anarchist and he just makes so much fun of me because I tell him about our actions: a bunch of nuns with candles and we cross the line and go in the pen and sing *Kumbaya* and then get let out thirty minutes later, and he's like, `Chelsea, you are not accomplishing anything out there. This is all a fun ritual, but what are you doing?` For me, the truth is that yes, in the words of Dorothy Day, the only thing that's wrong is our acceptance of this dirty, rotten system. But she also said that we have to live our lives in dramatically different ways. I'm not out there at the test site to get anyone else to do anything. I'm there to try to live my life in a different way and try to have an experience of interdependence and trust that I think is going to be the basis of any kind of sustainable security in our world. Trust in other people and trust in a transcendent security that comes from knowing who I am and knowing that I am loved. I feel like if I can get myself really strong in that and also work to weed out the roots of violence in my own psyche and all the ways that I'm tempted to fight with my family. And if I can do that, then that is an end in itself. That is accomplishing what I want to accomplish in the very process, not trying to be strategic and putting means towards some distant end.

Thank you for articulating that. That's good. That's interesting.

I feel like I talked a lot. Do you guys want to say anything?

[01:10:00] *Well, we can wrap this up because we're just about at the end of the CD as it is. So I just want to thank you guys very much.*

Kathryn Dillon: Do you want him to introduce himself?

Well, you have about three minutes, if you want to just say a little bit about yourself and what you're doing here. Why you're doing what you do.

Patrick Finn: I'm Patrick Finn. I'm just finishing up a master's degree in theology at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley. I am out here because I'm very dissatisfied with life and I'm really looking for a meaning and a purpose. Not that the nuclear struggle gives me purpose, but that community gives me purpose and the nuclear issue is definitively anti-community, I feel. I don't come out here to get purpose from having something to do. I just know that something about this is against what I'm going to find satisfaction in this life.

[01:11:29] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[End of interview]