

**WATCHERS, from page 8**

**K.S.:** We are getting a sense of things being wildly off. For instance, there is a whole file on a group that may be a fabrication or a fiction that it even existed. Maybe these were people who just got together in various ways. And what that teaches me is that people are relying on files like this to put forward narratives. So it's important to get in there and complicate the narratives.

**G.I.:** When it came to Lloyd Marbet, what happened in a police surveillance report, they drew up a kind of narrative of the ingredients for a Molotov cocktail. But when you hear Lloyd talk about it, it's the furthest thing from his mind. He was basically a complete pacifist and didn't believe in that kind of violent action. He even had a hard time justifying civil disobedience as a last resort.

For him, it took a lot of imagination to think that way because he's looking at it thinking, I have this old dog, which was a mutt, and it's described as a German Shepard. And I had this old truck that would break down, and I was spending time up in the mountains, so I would have to have a gas can because I would run out of gas, and it was constantly breaking down so I had oily rags in the back.

**K.S.:** That file was from 1972 surveillance of his attendance of the hearing on the Trojan nuclear plant. I was thinking, too, with these files, you see some informant transcripts, and those have an inflamed rhetoric, which I can imagine how that can affect how a group is perceived. And informants can have various motives for making something sound really lively and interesting.

**J.T.:** Did you just sift through the files and find what was interesting or did you have a couple organizations in mind? What was the most interesting?

**K.S.:** I think we've both looked at bigger collections early on like the American Indian Movement or the Black Panther Party and surveillance on anti-nuclear activism. One of the threads that's been interesting for me is what have activists been able to prevent from happening or were able to make happen. So with the anti-nuke activists, there were a lot of plans for nuclear plants in the area, but the construction of almost all of those, except for Trojan, were prevented. And Trojan was shut down from the relentless activism.

**J.T.:** During this time, the police were watching some fairly innocuous groups. Why were they so worried about these groups and have these preoccupations? Did this give you any insights into the thinking or mindset of the people doing this surveillance?

**K.S.:** Well, I think working with these files makes it really clear that one



*Kaia Sand and Garrick Imatani sit with a small portion of archives that comprise the Watcher Files, now on display through November at the City of Portland Archives and Records Center.*

PHOTO BY MARY HANSEN

motivation is to protect the power of the status quo, and threats to that power were reasons for surveillance. So women organizing were a perceived threat. Organizing around domestic violence in the late 1970s changed rape law so that husbands could be prosecuted for rape, and that's one of the things that enters the fuzz with media clippings. That was a way that people were organizing to make a change.

Challenges to the norms and laws of the day were perceived as threatening. That becomes something that I find really compelling about the subject and how we could continue to apply it. We know that not all laws are just and if surveillance is used in a way to prevent any challenges to produce a more just society that is something we should be alarmed about.

**G.I.:** If you think about this in a larger history, it's easy for us because we've been

focused on this one set of documents to think about as possibly isolated events, but we know from previous work that this is a history that predates these files, and even after the law changed in 1981 and the law made it illegal to do this kind of

(surveillance) work, there are new task forces and new ways of monitoring and collecting information on public groups. You'd have to go back a little bit further if you wanted to look at a larger systemic way of thinking.

It seemed to be an enormous task to even address these files. There are over 300 organizations here, so we're just scratching the surface. We could be working on this project for 10 years.

**J.T.:** Thinking about what's in the news today about government spying, have you had any insights into it and how much things have stayed the same even though they've changed?

**K.S.:** I guess one of the things I think

about is how we have security goals on one hand: to prevent something bad from happening to people, like violent crimes etc. But an unfortunate aspect of that surveillance is that it's often used to suppress dissent, and you can't really separate all that out too easily. I do know just from reading what Sen. Ron Wyden said that it doesn't seem like a lot of the surveillance has led to any prevention from anything happening, so it makes me skeptical of how this surveillance is being used.

I feel like these files offer me a little microcosm because they are a little more containable and they do reveal for me how much the people who were gathering these files let their own biases into who they were surveying, and it was very politically charged, the choices that they were making.

**G.I.:** I think the correlations of what you want to draw from the relationship between these past events and current events are there. I think that one thing that's been really interesting, too, is how different the times are and what sort of scale and magnitude that certain surveillance activities have taken on now.

You know, everything that's going on with the National Security Administration is so timely, but any time you do a project on surveillance it's usually pretty relevant.

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— KAIA SAND

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