

The Environment

Peacework's (Cont.)

a half time position where I was still in Coos Bay but commuting to Salem twice a month. Then in August of 1989 I moved to Salem to work in the office on a full time basis. The state coordinator at that time was Don Skinner and I was the other employee which we called administrative staff. Don left in May and I became the state coordinator then.

Smoke Signals : How does someone like Susan Gordon get into something like this?

Gordon : It's sort of interesting but I did a lot of organizing when I was in high school during the Vietnam war and I was very involved in my church at that time and did some literary magazines at my school. And, I actually became burned out by the end of high school though they didn't have terms for organizers at that point or for being burned out as an organizer but, when I got to college I didn't do anything and really shied away from political involvement for a long time. But, after my daughter was born in 1981 I no longer could not do anything. I felt a deep responsibility towards her to get back involved and become a leader in changing what was going on and protecting her future. So I started with an environmental group when I was in Coos Bay in 1978. After that I began doing more volunteer work with the local chapter there which was called the Bay Area Peace Alliance, and I was part of the group that formed Peace Works by attending the statewide meetings and by that point I was becoming active in the local chapter which became a Peace Works Chapter. I'm definitely an organizer, that's where my skills are and I'm also a leader and if I get involved in something I can't sit on the sidelines.

Smoke Signals : Let's talk about the actual protest that recently took place in Nevada and could you give me some details about that demonstration against the testing of nuclear arms.

Gordon : There was about 2500 people there and about 750 got arrested when they crossed the boundary to the site. The Nevada test site is about 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The day before the actual demonstration, there was an international conference that included some keynote speakers to welcome folks and get organized and then they had set up several theme rooms that you could go to during the day and be part of ongoing conversations. One of the theme rooms was focused on indigenous people and looking at the affects of nuclear testing on those indigenous people around the world and that was the room that most of the Shoshone and Native American people went to. The room I was in and helped facilitate was Definitions of non-violence and we spent time discussing what non-violence meant to individuals and what it meant in your life. It was an interesting and ongoing discussion, I don't know what came out in the afternoon but people's levels of what is non-violence and what is violence vary tremendously. APT has six guidelines that they ask you to abide by while your at an action there. One of them includes no destruction of property while you are on the test site. Which means no graffiti, notaking down signs, no destroying fences, nothing like that. And the other part of that is no verbal abuse to the people who are arresting you. For some people this is not violence and for some it is. But those are the restrictions for those actions that happen under the APT offices. So that was kind of interesting.

As far as the action went, we got out there fairly early in the morning and there were a couple of religious ceremo-

nies. There was a Christian ceremony where they did a communion kind of thing and Corbin Harney, who is the Shoshone Spiritual Leader, did a Shoshone Prayer. He also did a peace pipe ceremony on the stage with the Soviets that were there. There were several speakers from the stage and some music. I didn't get down to the front where they were crossing the fence. I didn't see what happened at the gate, but my understanding is that the Shoshone Elders went across first, then the Soviets, then the other indigenous people. Then the remaining people went across at the same time. So the group that I was with were all from Oregon and we crossed quite a distance back from the cattle guard which is where all the guards were. We started walking across the test site sort of to the west of where the cattle guard was and we must have walked maybe 30 or 40 minutes before we were stopped.

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- Susan Gordon

Smoke Signals : What did you see?

Gordon : I saw some very white rocks that I picked up and brought back with me. We saw some trash in there and someone picked up a stray pair of handcuffs. The handcuffs they use are the plastic cinch kind like you use on a trash bag only heavier. There were lots of cactus, they used to be some joshua trees but everything that was there is dead. There's some little roads that these sandbuggies travel on that the wackenhuts, who were the guards for the test site. And there's some downed electrical or phone wires and things like that. There's not alot out there.

Smoke Signals : What was your impression of the site.

Gordon : It's always interesting to cross the fences. It's not something I do casually and when I do a non-violence training and talk to people who haven't done it before I tell them that this is not a game and certainly not a game for me. And that if you're not prepared really in your heart to believe in what you're doing and do it for your own personal reasons then you shouldn't participate. You can't do it because it's fun or because your friends are doing it. And, if you're not ready to accept the consequences which in this case could be as much as six months in jail, don't do it. You're not doing it for the right reasons.

Smoke Signals : So, they took you on the bus and processed you. How did you get back home. Did you get to stay together as a group or did you all meet back there?

Gordon : Our affinity group went in together. Affinity groups are groups of people that go with the idea of supporting each other through the process. Some people stay on the legal side of the fence and they watch you're arrest, they watch you're arrest and see which bus you're put on, they follow the bus, they know where you're being taken, and their there to pick you up when you're released. And so we had two people in our group that took the cars and followed us. We were driven 60 miles north to the town of Beatty and then issued a citation then released on the street. There were six of us in my affinity group we walked

in and I was the first one to be arrested and then four of us that were arrested at the same time and two were, I can't say escaped because you don't escape, you don't run or try to prevent being arrested, but the guard that was arresting couldn't arrest us all. So four of us were stopped and two of us kept on walking and they were in a different area. So the four of us were arrested and put into a little circle on the ground and they asked us not to move and we cooperated with them. Then they moved us all over to another place near another guard and brought some other folks in together. We sat there maybe an hour or hour and a half. Then they brought a van over and put handcuffs on us then transported us to a holding pen near the cattle guard. It's just a large compound that's separated down the middle. They put men on one side and women on the other. They hold you there until they put you on the bus and then transport you then release you. I thought that the guards did really well. When I was arrested in 1987 they were really hyper and aggressive. In 1988 when people were doing blockades there was alot of violence and people were physically hurt. This time, there was one lieutenant who was really being a jerk and everyone who had come in contact with him was talking about him. But I didn't have any encounters. I and another women was grabbed from behind and thrown to the ground, but the guard didn't touch any of the men. He did this kind of macho stand off with them and there was no physical contact with the men and I thought that was kind of interesting. I think that I was the first person that he arrested and he was definitely worked up and he saw us from a distance and he told us not to move, we just kept walking and I was the first person he came up to and I just think he was a little enthusiastic about it. But what happened was when he threw the two of us to the ground, I mean he threw me to the ground and told me to sit and then he went after Jill and got her and when the men that were with us saw that they just stopped where they were because they weren't going to abandon us if this guy was going to be ruff and be a jerk. So they basically froze where they were and the guard tried to get them to walk over and join our little prison circle and they wouldn't do it. They said you have to come get me I'm not going to just walk over there for you. When the guard went over then they just walked over to the circle but he didn't touch them.

Smoke Signals : I can't help but notice that you have a sense of purpose and accomplishment by your actions, can you explain that?

Gordon : With this particular action, there's a couple of aspects of it for me, I was actually an organizer, getting people to go down there. So part of my sense of accomplishment is I did succeed in getting maybe 50 or 60 other folks to go down there. Each of those people that went had their own individual experience. The people that went for the first time are very enthusiastic about going back in April. Especially those that didn't cross the line, they're ready to make that kind of statement. So that feels good and that's part of what I feel afterwards. Part of my frustration though is that I feel fine about what I did myself, But I'm frustrated that the media doesn't cover those kinds of events and that it's been so lost in the Iraq situation that we can't even find what's going on at the United Nations Treaty Conference which is still going on right now. Its just been so preempted by the middle east situation and I have this feeling that one of the reasons was that George Bush knew that it would take the media away from the comprehensive test ban and really limit public outcry about vetoing a comprehensive test ban by the United States. So, I think it was a very political strategic date that was chosen to preempt any public awareness that this conference was even happening.