

PAM SOLO. Born 1946.

TRANSCRIPT of OH1528 A-C.

This interview was recorded on September 23, 1996. It was later donated to the Maria Rogers Oral History Program and the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum. The interviewer is LeRoy Moore. The interview transcript was prepared by Julie Boyle.

NOTE: The interviewer's questions and comments appear in parentheses. Added material appears in brackets. The archiving of this interview was made possible by a grant from Colorado Humanities.

ABSTRACT: Pam Solo helped produce the booklet "Local Hazard, Global Threat" and was a key organizer for the Rocky Flats 1978 demonstration, before it turned into an act of extended civil disobedience. As a staff member of the American Friends Service Committee, she worked on making Rocky Flats the focus of national attention—emblematic of the military-industrial complex—while creating a web of relationships in the Colorado community. In this interview, Solo follows the step-by-step progression of education, activism, and strategy that first brought Rocky Flats to the public's attention and then to an international stage for peace discussions. She talks about specific people, politicians, and organizations; critical negotiations and tensions; and leveraged opportunities.

[A].

00:00 (Well I was really interested in what you would say about when you got involved with the Rocky Flats issue—how you learned about it in the first place, what year that was when you first got involved, what—you, you mentioned a moment ago that the campaign at least was governed by environmental and health concerns—I don't know if that's the way you came at it—)

Well, I think it—I think that that was the way we figured out how we could, uh, flip the switch of public attention, bring the issue close to home but—when I first got involved in Rocky Flats it was as—right after the peace agreements—

(The what?)

The peace agreements—the Viet—you know, the action around the Viet Nam —there wasn't much left for us to do in terms of grass roots mobilization. And throughout the Vietnam War, all the research on the military industrial complex—in U.S. foreign policy we had just facilitated the overthrow of the Allende government and—I think that we real—Judy Danielson and I were the service committee staff—

(You were, you were already on the staff?)

Yeah, Judy, Judy and I were doing—

(Working on these other issues)

—on Vietnam.

(I see).

—and human rights. We were the peace staff and we sat around and did a lot of—

(I never knew that.)

—evaluation of, while the war was over—why weren't we feeling more optimistic about the future?

(Uh huh, yeah.)

And we realized is that what we had learned in the process of organizing against the war was that Vietnam was one example of a whole direction and—[a portion of the audio here is incidental conversation with a child]—

(That's fascinating).

—and so—

(What, what year was that, do you remember, roughly?)

Well, I think that—you know I have to get everything straight. What I can tell you is that all this happened around the end—the end of the war and before the fall of Saigon.

(That you began to look at other possibilities?)

Right, because we had been showing this slide show 'til we could say it in our sleep, about the air war and how Honeywell and Dow and all these companies had been making antipersonnel weapons and, a part of the AFSC was called NARMIC, National Action Research on the Military-Industrial Complex. So I think consolidating the lessons of Vietnam we realized that, what we had done in Vietnam both militarily and in terms of—both military and foreign policy—it didn't, the problem didn't go away with the end of the war. We were just—probably had educated ourselves and were at the beginning stages of the kind of organizing that needed to happen. So we, produced—

(Did you know by then what—about Rocky Flats and what it did?)

Yeah, we got a group of people together who were a combination of environmentalists and peace activists. Morey Wolfson was the environmentalist that I remember most distinctly and, Jock Cobb, and we started looking at what was around in Denver. We produced a little brochure that said—it was a tourist brochure about “Welcome to Colorado, home of the Military-Industrial Complex”. And that brochure had a map of Rocky Flats, Rocky Mountain Arsenal, what went on at the various military bases. Then we went into, like, Chamber of Commerce and hotel

lobbies and put our brochure on the stack there, next to the other things. It was, like, the first shot at trying to, to educate people that what we'd all come to know about the nature of the economy—political economy, military economy—during the war was really at—was part of our problem right at home. So we started a research and education project that focused on the nerve gas at the arsenal and then at Rocky Flats. And then Jock Cobb got more and more information, or questions really, I think is what he got, and concern about—

04:53 (About radiation?)

— about Rocky Flats and the level of radiation, and we—so Judy and I started working very closely with Jock and figuring out a plan to go seeking more information about Rocky Flats— what did it do, who was watching—we had this whole kind of period where we tried to find out what they were doing, and then who was watching it.

(Who was watching it.)

Yeah.

Yeah.

So we just started asking a lot of questions—to fire departments, health department state and local officials, the governor's office—

(Did you know, Ed Martel and—).

Yeah.

(—and was he—did you get information from him—)

Um-hmm. Yeah, we did this period of talking to all the experts that we could to try to get ourselves educated about things. And then slowly uncovered the facts about what Rocky Flats did, the levels and volume of problems there, getting Freedom of Information requests and information about the accidents. And, we talked to Ed Martel about his work on low-level radiation—

(Right.)

—and, it became clearer and clearer that of all this military-industrial complex in Colorado that Rocky Flats was the biggest and most serious concern to take up. And that was probably in '73 and '74. So for several years we did this this research and writing, and interviewing people and having conversations with officials about who was watching what, and then we would hold these periodic demonstrations.

(When did those start?)

Oh, I think that they started in '74 and '75. And then in—I think it was the summer of '76—

(Out, out there at the site?)

Well we would do them downtown and out at the site. And then, I forget what, what year it was, we did—oh, we would brainstorm: How are we going to draw attention to Rocky Flats and make the issue?—and that’s when we came up with the balloon release idea.

(Yeah. Releasing that large number of balloons—).

—of helium-filled balloons with a tag that said, “If you find this tag please mail it back to the American Friends’ Service Committee, Rocky Flats Action Group” and then, our address on Lafayette Street, and then it said what Rocky flats is and does and [told about] the problem with plutonium. What happened then was, two national groups—two national offices of peace organizations—learned about our work. And that was the national office of the American Friends’ Service Committee and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. And they—

(But you were already working for AFSC—).

Yeah, but the nation—[coughs]—the Philadelphia office was pretty much consumed in trying to figure out how to organize against the B1 bomber. We said, We’re not going to do the B1 bomber, we’re going to do Rocky Flats. Because Rockwell was one of the chief contractors for the B1, and it turned out that one of the things that we organized around was the shifting of_____

(So you had to debate the national people about that?)

Yeah, oh yeah. We took, we said, “We’re not going to do the B1, I mean we’ve got to organize in ways that make sense to the local communities, and there’s a much more serious set of issues around where and how nuclear weapons are built all over the country.” [Interviewee and child talking, unrelated to interview.]

(What, what was the other national organization?)

The Fellowship of Reconciliation. They both got very interested in the model that we were creating in Colorado. But I was going to say parenthetically earlier that, one of the tools that we had was the fact that in those years that, Dow was being kicked out—well, had lost their contract to manage Rocky Flats. So that created a public forum for finding out more information—

(You think that was due mainly to the 1969 fire or—)

Yeah, there were a number of accidents. I mean they found out that in twenty years Dow Chemical had never changed the air filters at the plant, and things like that. I mean their record was even, even—I guess at this point it was ERDA [Energy Research and Development Administration] and not DOE [Department of Energy]—

09:59 (Right.)

—even they acknowledged that this was the most horrendous example of corporate management of one of these facilities. And so we used the contract bidding process as a way to create controversy and raise consciousness about Rocky Flats.

We had—early on we had a theory about how we were going to do this. That it was going to be education—an intense period of research and education—and that everything we would do would always come out of a real solid knowledge because we were going to, weren't going to be overstepping our bounds in terms of what we know and what we didn't know, so that would just be part of our methodology. And so we relied heavily on health officials, people in preventive medicine and health and, as you said, Ed Martel and people at NCAR, and other people around the country and internationally who had reputations in studying radiation and the health effects. So, we, we didn't try to take on something that was beyond our expertise, but we brought in the experts, and choreographed their involvement.

(So, it was you and Judy and some person that the AFSC called in on Rocky Flats_____?)

Um-hmm. Yep.

(Was there a role played by the wife of Senator Johnson—what's her name? Do you know this woman —somehow I've heard that—)

Oh, Kay Johnson. Yeah. Kay. Well—

(Was she involved in AFSC?)

She was, yeah, she was involved with the AFSC. Kay—

(Was she on their board or whatever you call it?)

She was actually the—kind of administrative assistant.

(She was what?)

The administrative assistant. She was sort of, like, our office manager—

(At the AFSC?)

Yeah, and—

(That right? The senator's wife?)

He's a former congressman, a one-term congressman. Yeah, he served only one term. And Kay—

(This was in the Senate, right?)

No Congress.

(Oh, I thought—okay.)

In the House. Yeah, Byron—Byron and—

(So he was no longer in that congress.)

No, uh-uh, not at this point.

(So she wasn't _____—okay.)

Yeah, no she—but Kay was a real supporter and cheerleader, and she thought this was a great idea. But what she was on the board of was the Fellowship of Reconciliation [FOR].

(That so?)

So that, that's—in fact you helped me remember that's how the FOR got knowledge about what we were doing. And so in the summer of '76, I guess it was, we held an international training on organizing around nuclear weapons, in Denver. It was co-sponsored by the national office of the AFSC and the—

(International training.)

Um-hm. It was mainly people from the United States, but we had people from several other countries there. And we taught them—we used the Rocky Flats organizing as the case and talked about how we did the research, how we did our organizing. At that point it became obvious that there was something—well, that we were just getting started, and that there was a lot of interest in what we were creating. We had just finished producing the more comprehensive booklet called “Local Hazard, Global Threat”—

(You had produced a copy by that time?)

Yeah.

(Because that's—you offered two versions of it or only one at this stage or later—or did a large version come out or, or was it—? I don't remember, I'm just asking you. Or did it come out only in that one form? There was a pamphlet—)

I can't—

(—it seems to me that there was a pamphlet that preceded that, but maybe—)

There was some chatter [?]-I've got these things somewhere—I'd be glad to dig—

(I'll bet you do.)

Yeah, I've—

(I probably have quite a few of them.)

Right. I'd love to—we should consolidate this so that they're in somebody's hands, and I'd be glad to give you my stuff in a little bit. I think we produced a lot of materials that were trying to do educational things, but I think what was neat about this “Local Hazard, Global Threat” things was that it was the first time a peace group had done something other than just mimeograph a leaflet [laughs]—

(Right.)

It had footnotes, you know—

(Yeah, oh yeah.)

It's the whole magilla here, so—

(Unclear comment)

But yet it was sure readable, it had graphics—we said that we've got to make this look good, it's got to stand out on its own two feet—intellectually, informationally, and—

14:55 (Yeah.)

—and it has to be accessible.

(Right.)

And what that did is—people really read it, and they got excited. This thing, “Local Hazard, Global Threat,” it was one of those things where the light goes on again.

(To coin that phrase—)

The group that was organizing was very small and playful about ideas and strategies. It was very congenial. It's one of those things that sort of, I think, really, I don't remember if any single person did, or if it kind of grew out of our—

(Your conversations?)

—our conversations. It just became obvious that we were, what we were trying to do is—say some complicated things.

(Oh, yeah.)

And if you're going to say some complicated things about the problem you had to _____ thing that caught those complications and opened people's minds. So I think as far as slogan goes, I've never run into anyone that [chuckles] tops that.

(Yeah).

You know.

(That's a good one.)

So, that's when Mike Jendrzeczyk, from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, said to me that—

(How do you spell his name, I wonder?)

[narrator attempts to spell his name]

(I'll find it.)

Yeah. I've got it. He said to me, "The training went incredibly well, and so when you guys get ready to take this to the next step—whatever that means—call and—." We kept staying in touch. And it became obvious that the only way we were going to make any—I had been appointed to the governor's monitoring committee—for Rocky Flats—

(How'd that get created?)

It got created after Lamm and Wirth were elected.

(And they produced the Lamm-Wirth Study?)

They produced the Lamm-Wirth Task Force Report, which we used as—the minute they were elected, Judy and I went to visit them, and as we were going into their office, to Wirth's office, the Kelly brothers from the plant were walking out.

(Who?)

Jim Kelly, and I forget his brother's name.

(Oh-h-h-h!) (Exclaiming.)

But they were, like, the union leaders for the—

(Yeah.)

—for the plant, and so we—

(Did they know you?)

They came to know us, yep. [Chuckles.]

(I mean at that point, did they know, were they—?)

No, they didn't know us then. [Over continued indistinguishable dialog of interviewer.]

(That's very interesting.)

But we acknowledged who they were, and then subsequently went to sit down and visit with them. And we also—I don't know what the word is, there were so many, I think, important things that we did in that organizing—is that we knew that we had to have a conversation with the workers going on—we were not their adversaries.

(Yeah. Do you feel like you did that, a lot?)

I think, um—[lengthy pause]—I think we did. I'd like to get—that's a big question, and one would have to go back and really look at all the stage—steps that we took. I think that—

(I'm asking that because—)

—I think this relates to the question you asked further down, about the civil disobedience, because we think—from my point of view, we were laying a very careful strategy. It wasn't, we would just like wake up and say, "Well, what are we going to do today?" We had sort of a vision about how we would escalate, and where the conversations had to take place so that you brought people along. And so it was: talk to neighborhood people, talk to the workers, open a dialogue with, Rockwell themselves, educate the public, inform the media, and try to create such a powerful momentum there that—and so the issues of conversion were brought up from the very beginning. And again, we did our thing of bringing in experts who could—

(Talk about that?)

Talk about that. And, and we tried to organize and push the governor. And in fact, the task force, the Rocky Flats task force, had recommended that the operations at the plant be phased out. So we said, "What does this mean, 'phased out?'" I mean, they're saying phased out. You can't phase something out if you're not making progress on two levels. One is, what are you going to do for the workers, and the local community, in terms of jobs and economic impact? And, what Rocky Flats makes can only be made obsolete if you address the larger issue of U.S.-Soviet relations.

20:07 (Right.)

So, it was at that point that it became obvious to us that we could push Rocky Flats up to a certain point, but that, then a congressional delegation and the governor's office would just get us back in a cul-de-sac of more commissions and more studies, and you know, monitoring, and

all that was a way of patting the public on the head, and not doing anything. So I called the— Judy and I talked about it and we called the FOR and said that we have to make this a national issue. Something larger has to happen. So we started the process of discussing a joint responsive thing with the FOR, and then working our way through the decision-making levels within the service committee about putting an enormous amount of resources and focus on making Rocky Flats a symbol of the arms race and helping us make it a national issue. So in '77 we made that determination and started organizing in that direction. And then I started doing nothing but traveling around the country, talking to people, and doing radio talk shows and public speaking and so on and so forth, to talk about the fact that— what Rocky Flats did and why we were going to have the national demonstration and act of civil disobedience at the plant in April—what was the day?

(April of '78.)

It was April of '78 but I don't re—I think it was April 20th or something like that. The exact date I don't remember. And so we, we spent a year in preparation for the demonstration.

(So, so there was a plan to do civil disobedience all the time.)

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. The plan, however, was to do civil disobedience, and we knew that we were going to get an enormous amount of national attention. We were conducting this dialogue with the union and with state and local officials and neighborhood people. And so we said it was going to be symbolic—but we would be back. And what happened then is the momentum built, and the entire country's attention started shifting to, as you know, remember to the problems of radiation and accidents and Three Mile Island—

(Three Mile Island—)

That happened and people were excited—

(Three Mile Island was '79—)

'79. Okay, Three Mile Island hadn't happened—but anyway, so we were starting that—but we were starting up through the curve where Three Mile Island kinds of things were happening. But there was a mobilization for survival—I had it focused on Barnwell in South Carolina at a nuclear power facility. So Rocky Flats was—we were making it a national issue. And the press was all over us. I mean we were—all the networks, and the New York Times and—it was just an enormous amount of attention and an incredibly successful outcome. I mean, we set out to make Rocky Flats a national issue and we did it. And then what, I think what happened—

(In 1978?)

In 1978. But what happened was—

(That's when I learned about Rocky Flats.)

Yeah.

(I'd been living in Denver since 1974, and I didn't really know it existed.)

Yeah. It was appalling to me how few people, even in positions of responsibility—

(Knew about it?)

I'm sorry?

(Knew about it?)

Yeah, knew about it, or cared, until we started rattling their cage— But at that point it was that all that excitement—we had brought Dan Ellsberg, and Helen Caldecott, and a bunch of other national speakers we had gotten. And Jackson Browne—it was like, exciting—and a lot of enthusiastic people.

And in the middle of the training for the civil disobedience people started talking about wanting to carry it on, to go further, further than one day. So there was a significant flash of ideas there, about that it shouldn't go on because we had for years been weaving this web of contacts and relations, and our hope was that after that demonstration of power, that we would go back to the table and say to the governor, "Now, what are you going to do? And if you don't do this, [phone ringing] then there really will be an escalation of action, another national demonstration, and an extended period of"—you know whatever. I mean, we were always prepared to do more than—

25:02 (The escalation happened a lot quicker.)

The escalation happened—it was—it's a logical—no, logical isn't the right word, but it's predictable—

(That it would happen?)

That it would happen. I mean it was totally predictable.

(I had a question. I don't know if it's correct that Daniel Ellsberg invited people to join him on the site _____ [rest of question is not understandable]?)

I don't remember if he said that. I think it's sort of— he might have said something like that: "Join me." But Dan bolted, and a lot of people followed him.

(Yes.)

And Judy Irving, who did the movie "Dark Circle," has footage of that next morning when it was supposed to end—the CD [civil disobedience]. That's when they said they're not leaving, and so I drove out in the rain to meet with the people on the tracks, and she's got this footage of us— Mike Jendrzeczyk and I having this huge fight with—

([Comment not understandable])

Uh-uh. It was sort of—he's got it, though. But Daniel said, "We're going to stay here until Jimmy Carter comes and meets with us. He's coming to visit SERI [Solar Energy Research Institute], and we're going to block those trains, and we're going to make him—at this point, I think, there was a lot of grandiosity [laughs] because of the excitement and the national attention—that they could actually force Jimmy Carter to come out and meet with them.

(I'm not sure anybody out there played that role _____)

That's right. I think he being charismatic and Dan Ellsberg—

(And _____ Clark—

And _____ Clark—people said, "I'm going to stay out here with him." And then we met quickly about this new development, and—

(Who's we?)

Well, the people from—the organizers of the demonstration—

(_____?)

All of us were the key organizers at this point. You know, what are we going to do and what are our choices? And it became obvious that the only thing to do was to support the people who stayed. And that we needed—they needed to spin off and form an independent group, and that we should function parallel to them and that we would try to purs—by doing that, keeping ourselves separate from their decision, but supportive of them—

(So the two groups got created?)

The two groups got created—that we would try, therefore, to keep our conversations with other people going, and try to leverage the civil disobedience for more change rather than getting into a pissing match with them. So we did everything in our fatigued state that we could to provide the logistical support—you know, tents and all that kind of stuff.

But they were then on their own, and then the character of the movement was also shaped by the visual images that they projected over those weeks, out on the tracks, and a lot of people were recruited into the movement through that action. I don't know if anybody—if we lost anybody in the long run, because of it. And I don't know if we would have been able to pursue—if Dan Ellsberg hadn't been the speaker when we followed our path—Is that thing whistling? Is that what that is? [reference to the tape recorder]

[discussion about the tape recorder]

In any case. There's no way of knowing whether, had our grand strategy not met reality [chuckles] of other peoples' enthusiasm and intervention—but I think this is what happens with movements—

(Oh, yeah.)

And once you get them going you lose control of them, and you have to plan for that. And you just plan for it, that at some point the whole thing will spin out on its own.

29:55 [End of Part A]

[B].

00:00 —everything had changed. But I also was aware that we'd made Rocky Flats an issue, a national issue and an international issue, and that it was time to start leveraging that toward more of a national campaign to stop nuclear weapons. And having helped to ignite a whole network of grassroots campaigns because—I don't know if you remember this, LeRoy, but one of the things that grew out of the Rocky Flats stuff is that we also formed something called the Nuclear Weapons Facility Task Force?

(I do.)

And that was—

(I don't know it well, but I—)

Yeah, it grew out of all that traveling through '77 and '78, in support of the action, and then the booklet "Local Hazard, Global Threat"—people started wanting to do similar research and that training that I mentioned earlier. So what we ended up forming jointly with the FOR and the AFSC—with Mike and myself as the staff people—this Nuclear Weapons Facility Task Force, which brought people from every state and city where components of nuclear weapons were researched, produced, and tested together. And we met and did strategy-building, information sharing—

(When did that happen?)

That happened in—as a result of the '78 action. And so the first conference of the weapons facility task force was in '79. And so then we started servicing that group of people, and we produced a second book following "Local Hazard, Global Threat," which was called "Makers of the Nuclear Holocaust." And that laid out—that did nationally what "Local Hazard, Global Threat" did—

(—showed all of the facilities, what they made, and—)

—their path, their plutonium path. And it was in that same year that a group of us went to the Soviet Union to meet with the Soviets about the proposal that Randy Forsberg and other people up here had been resuscitating with that idea of a freeze.

(When did you go there?)

In '79, the fall of '79.

(Wow. And you were talking about the freeze idea or something like what became the freeze idea?)

Yeah, well we were talking specifically about the freeze—

(By then.)

We—I had been working closely with Randy Forsberg, talking to her about what she was doing and thinking. She had written the freeze proposal, and then—this was when I started doing most of my national organizing because it seemed to me to be the leverage—the spin-off. So we took her proposal, and we took it to the Soviet Union and said, “If the United States would agree to this, would you agree?”

(Who did you talk to over there?)

I'd have to go back in my—

(Government people?)

—mostly people in the academies, but also, we were traveling with a guy named Arthur Macy Cox, who had written “Russian Roulette.” He'd been in the CIA, when George Bush was the head of it, and was a member of Team B [laughs]. I forget what all that even means, but Arthur Macy Cox was somebody that a lot of very high-level Soviets really wanted to meet. He was a heavy duty guy. And at that point we met with somebody who was very close to [Leonid Ilyich] Brezhnev, and I'd have to go back to my notes. But we had it from very highly-placed sources that the Soviets would respond favorably.

(Do you have any idea where Gorbachev was when that was happening?)

I don't.

(You never heard of him, I'm sure, but— [?])

Mmm-mm. I'd be, I'd love to know where—

(It would be very interesting to know, because I think he was enormously influenced by the peace movement in this country.)

I think he was too. And in the western European peace movements. I think he basically just read the handwriting on the wall, that this couldn't be stopped. Because you know the other thing I was doing at this point in '79 and '80 was starting to relate to the European peace movements. And we traveled all over Western Europe, making contacts in England with E and D [?] and C and D [?], with the Dutch peace movement who were so important in the strategic thinking and planning. And you know the Mediterranean countries and the Scandinavian countries, and started participating in a group called —what was that called?—International Peace Coordination and Cooperation, IPCC, which was the consortium of European peace movements. And Mike Jendrzeczyk and I represented the U.S. in those discussions. In those discussions, we did a lot of talking about the independent movements in the east, and how to work with them, how to cooperate, how to nurture them, and just in those conversations it became obvious—

05:35 (Did you try to reach out to any of those independent people yourself personally?)

Yeah, I did. We communicated in writing. There was statements that we would—declarations that we would send back and forth to them in support, and then, there were representatives of this IPCC group who would represent the group and go to visit with Charter 77 [?] and the various independent—Solidarity—and others in eastern Europe to communicate the sentiments of the peace movements of the west to them. And then we were asked to support a Soviet group, a group to establish trust—

(____group____.)

Yeah, all those people.

(____in other places as well.)

Right.

(Those people____.)

Exactly. And I visited some of them in '83, I guess it was, in Moscow—

(I'd been _____ with them in '85 and again in '87, and they were [chuckles], they were not treated well.)

Yeah.

(They were not treated well.)

Yeah [sighs]. It was really something.

(Anyway, but all those groups played a crucial role in it. What were some of the other key persons along the way? You mentioned a few persons or groups. I'm thinking especially of local folks. You mentioned Morey Wolfson: he was an environmentalist and I know he was involved in "Local Hazard, Global Threat"; he helped to get that published.)

Yeah, he was. Yeah, he had a huge, huge role in that. Because I think that, that's something that the peace movement learned from the environmental movement [laughs], I think, that things should look pretty. That there should be an aesthetic quality to it.

(He understood that?)

Oh, yeah, I think he did. I mean, I resonated with it, because that's sort of my orientation anyway, but, yeah, I think Morey and—you know—the problem with some of this is there are many other people whose names I'm not going to remember.

(Oh, yeah; oh, of course.)

But the key people early on were Jock Cobb, Judy Danielson, and Morey and myself. I mean, we were really the core that got the thing going. And then this woman who has long blonde hair—who—Jan, uh—

(Blonde hair—tails, pigtails?)

Hm-m. [Pause.] But anyway, that early phase, it was those people, and then Loren Wiger[?]
—was that his name?—he lived in Boulder? And then there was the—I, I keep running into eras. There was the first era, which was that smaller group of people. And then after the '78 rally, when we were able to turn it into a national issue, then a number of other people became much bigger participants and players in the whole thing. That second era would be Chet [Tchozewski] and Ellen—

(Ellen Klaver?)

Yeah, Ellen Klaver. And um—

(Carol Rothman? I know she was on the staff.)

Oh, sure, Carol Rothman, would have been—

(Do you know where she is now?)

She's out in California, I think. Yeah, I forgot about Carol. Carol would really be on the second wave. I mean, all of us went into the second wave, too, but it—then the guy— there was another guy, Roy, um—

(Roy Young?)

Roy Young, yeah. I think he was really important. And Chet would remember—there was one other guy who was high energy. But he, but he didn't stick around. But he was very wiry, an interesting guy. I forget his name. But I think those were the people that stand out in my mind as—we had this difficult moment of, “Well, what do we do with this? It's a total change in

plans. Everybody's exhausted." I mean, some of us were not only exhausted, we had death threats and notes delivered at our—I mean I did—at my door, and phone calls, and the FBI and—you know, blah-blah-blah— so we were, we were, like, not in the best position to have this thing carry on.

10:49 (Yeah.)

And on two fronts: one is our grand strategy had us going in this direction, and then somehow got whip lashed over here. And then, the second thing is that we got it to that point and we needed the break to sort of regroup. Because it had been very intense. There was a lot of focus put on a couple of us who were more out front—visible. So there was a lot of pressure. But it was those people, I think, who—we kind of all made it through—I think it's a huge success story, that we made it through that transition and shift in grand strategy to "How do we make this all work for us?"

(Yeah.)

And then you were involved in all those days, too.

(Yeah.)

As a really modera [moderate? moderating?]

(And a lot of other people.)

Yeah. You remember—you know, it sort of became a Denver-Boulder [laughs]—there was a Boulder base and a Denver base and—

(That's true. Yeah. I was living in Denver at that time and moved to Boulder in '83 and—.)

And then you started taking, I remember in our meetings, you being, people being—there were a lot of very thoughtful, sophisticated people who came together. Who disagreed, but disagreed respectfully and then found ways to make effective strategy overall much stronger. And then, who was that guy we had from Boulder who eventually ran against Tim Wirth, too, and—he was a doctor—

(That's Doctor, he's a physician [?] Mc— something—What is his name? Oh boy. I see him quite a bit—McFarland, Bob McFarland—

Bob McFarland, yeah. It was after—I guess, before the 1980 demonstration, maybe, and Tim Wirth's staff came into our office. And we already had 5,000 names from the first demonstration, right, and—just from Boulder—in a card file. And they were furious at me that Bob McFarland was running and that we were—

(Was that _____?)

They were purists [?]
—they walked, they slammed my door—
“What the fuck are you doing?”
—they were yelling. I said, “Look: what is Tim going to do about this? I mean I don’t have anything to do with Bob McFarland running, but I’ll tell you—See those cards?—I’m going to give them to him if you don’t—probably—_____ cringe, but—

(Laughs.)

Oh, it was fun. But so we started—I think we learned how to leverage off each other’s styles and build on that. And that was my experience of it. It wasn’t— Initially it was a very painful thing and it was hard because it was so many people from the outside, like Ellsberg and the guy from Washington who they did the movie about—the Community for Creative Non-Violence—Mitch —

(Mitch Snyder.)

Yeah, Mitch Snyder.

(Did he come through Boulder, or to Colorado?)

I think he did.

(I didn’t know that.)

Yeah, a lot of these guys who liked doing civil disobedience were attracted to, were attracted to doing that—

(I know—)

I think CD has, totally has its place, but I also think, given the web of relationships that we were trying to create and win over—so the relationships with the union really fell apart—

(I was going to ask that.)

I think that the relationships with the union and the dialog that we had really went to pot—

(After the CD)

Yeah. Because we had sort of told them where we were headed. We were going to show some support here, show power. We were serious about this economic conversion. And the message on the tracks was, sort of, it was, you know it was just counter to what a lot of these guys were about. To me, part of the difference was not only grand strategy. It was misunderstanding of the class politics that we were also trying to work with. But—

15:13 (Yeah.)

But there were a clash of cultures and class there anyway, because there was sort of the civil disobedience culture—the Mitch Snyders and—the just-say-no crowd [chuckles].

(Yeah. Yeah. I know that people who were interested in civil disobedience came from afar, the kind of people who _____ [Long unintelligible commentary]—a place in California, what's it called?)

Diablo Canyon.

(Diablo Canyon, right. People followed those actions and, I guess it makes sense that they would. And a lot of people were living a very marginal life so they could do that sort of thing.)

That's right.

(And they did it).

Yeah. You know, when you put it all together twenty years later or whatever, it's a pretty good stew. When you're right in the middle of it, all you can feel is like you're in the stew [laughs]. But you can taste it later.

But I don't feel like I really moved on from Rocky Flats. I think that some of the national organizing—the Freeze [Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign] and all that kind of stuff— was all essential to create an environment and a dia—to create the international politics in which the demands for closing and converting Rocky Flats just seemed more and more reasonable. Because nuclear weapons seemed more and more obsolete. And so, in my own mind, I felt that the two were totally consistent. But then I got that fellowship to come east to write a book about things—

(When was that?)

It was '84 or '85. And—

(I knew it was after the encirclement. So it was about a year after that?)

Yeah. I guess I got the fellowship, and it was really for the years of '85-'86. And '84 we went back to the Soviet Union and to Eastern Europe. After that I got this fellowship, and by then, by Reagan's re-election—LeRoy, to tell you the truth I was really disheartened because I also felt that in some ways we had failed.

(Which election?)

His second, Reagan's re-election in '84. I felt that the freeze movement—had allowed itself to lose momentum and be co-opted, and that the strength—

(_____, that just seemed so bizarre. But I guess it's true that people don't see _____ what he was doing.)

I don't think they did, and I also feel—the other thing is that because the freeze became so big and so strong we also started down the road like so many national movements. Which is that the local base became—the local base of these movements, the Weapons Facility Task Force, all these local campaigns—sort of became secondary to the big kid politics that a lot of the Washington-types were playing—

(Especially with the freeze movement?)

Especially with the freeze movement. Yeah. But especially with the environmental movement, any of these movements, they've gotten totally—I think that most of the movement representatives—progressive movement representatives and EGO's [?]
—are now a huge part of the problem of why we don't have political power. Because I don't think that they—my gut—in my own eyes it was always like, you build these local campaigns and build strength at the local level. And all you do is _____ that, you facilitate that. And the national groups, they don't, they don't believe in local power. They just, they kind of pat us all on the head and like, keep those letters and checks coming in and, that's about what grassroots groups are good for.

(Yeah.)

And that's why I'm doing this Institute for Civil Society. [Chuckles.] Because that's what I want—you know—to go back and find what are the issues in which we can—because the right wing does national politics at the state and local level. And that's one of the reasons they're, they're winning.

(Yep.)

[pause]

Who else was involved that you remember?

(Hmm?)

Who else was involved that you remember?

(Back then?)

Yeah.

20:15 (Well, I remember students at Metro—there was a young woman— Jackie [?], Jackie, oh boy—she and Kevin somebody, they must have gotten married. But they were very, very effective at organizing students on the Auraria campus. They did a lot of events there—)

Yeah.

—that were quite effective.

Yeah, that's what's so—when you talk about—you think back through this, it's like, the whole thing worked because so many people got involved. At so many different levels.

(Jackie[?] and I went off together a few times and did the Rocky Flats slide show, _____ slide show. That's how I got to know her, _____. I was also teaching a course there, I was teaching a course on non-violent social change, which I _____ political science department _____ got accepted in _____.

Well, Tom Rauch. I shouldn't forget Tom Rauch because—

(I don't know what his involvement was at this earlier stage. I know he certainly played a major role in later times.)

Yeah, I view him as sort of a—

(He was a campus minister at first—)

He was a campus minister, and I think he—once he came on the staff of the [American Friends] Service Committee, I think that we went from the second era to the third era, and that Tom sort of has been—And then I don't really know who else has been—

(There were a few people that worked on the staff of the _____. A young woman by the name of Lorraine Higbee?).

Mm-hm. Mary Alice Burns—

(And—yeah—).

Once the Colorado Coalition got going, and, Tom, Tom represented the AFSC, and the AFSC stuck with Rocky Flats, and I think that was really, really an important thing. What happened to the Truth Force? How did that sort of—it kind of dissipated at some point—

(It had actually dissipated, it didn't—. Chet was the staff person for a while, and it—I think they just ran out of energy and probably funds. It lasted for a year or two. They had a ten-year reunion in the last couple of years ago. That must have been what, '88 or '89 when they did that?)

Mm-hm.

(And that was a wonderful event. Ellsberg came, and a lot of other speakers came from all around the country. That was a time, just sharing and—)

I found some old clips the other day. I had forgotten that Ram Dass was out there—

(Oh, really?)

Yeah [laughs]. We had some fun then. Yeah, it was—

(Allen Ginsberg—)

Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne—I mean, we had some good folk involved, and here we are, the Cold War is over, communism is collapsed, and we're still, in some ways—

(____ the environmental movement—)

Yeah, the environment. The thing that opened the window is still the persistent and in some ways the unsolvable problem—

(We have much more citizen involvement now, and we have enormous amounts of information that wasn't available until very recently _____. Then we have these government people for the most part lining up with each other—the state, the EPA, and DOE, lining up with each other that _____ radiation _____. So—)

_____. I'll never forget some of those when—some of the most creative actions that we did, like the balloon release. But one of those [was] with Lloyd Nixon's pig, taking it to the Rocky Flats Task Force meetings? This was in—

25:11 (You actually—)

'73, '74—

(____.)

—What?

(You took the pig to the Task Force?)

Yeah, in '73, right after Lamm and Wirth were elected, right, they formed the Rocky Flats Task Force. And so what we did was, we followed that task force from day one. We stuck with them and got—

(Were you a member of that? Did you—)

No, I was—

(You were on the Monitoring Council.)

Yeah. Now, one of the offshoots of the task force was to set up this monitoring committee. So Jock was on—Jock Cobb was on the Task Force—In that task force they say the plant should be closed—

(Uh-huh. This was the Lamm-Wirth Task Force.)

Right. So, we're like, all right, we're going to stick them with their own words. And so we would go to these task force hearings, present evidence, ask questions. And then one time we did an action—we did a lot of direct action things—and one of them was Lloyd Nixon, who had all of these deformed animals? He had one whose name was Scooter, and this pig was born without any hind feet, hind legs. So we took the pig in a box and presented it to the Task Force hearing, with the cameras and the blinking— [Chuckles.] It was great. Made all the papers. It was fun. And Scooter's picture was in "Local Hazard, Global Threat."

It was the task force that then recommended that a monitoring committee be set up. And then I was appointed to the monitoring committee. So we would meet—I don't, I really can't remember how often—but it seemed once a week, and we'd have these 7:00 AM meetings out at Rocky Flats—

(Who was on that? Was that appointed by the task force, or by the governor, or—)

It was by the governor. And it was people who represented science—I was the adversary, the clear adversary. It was business people, academics involved in epidemiology, so on and so forth. And we'd go out there for these meetings and at 7:00 AM, and I'd get to my office by 9:00—and you'd just, you'd be totally numb. I would be totally sick and numb at what we had just—you know the kind of conversations that we had just had. And briefings.

(Why?)

Well, the language that—the euphemisms that they used—you know—a nuclear excursion, as though it was a trip up, down the Colorado River—and stuff. A nuclear excursion was an accident. I mean, just you kind of catalog all the language, and you'd walk around the plant with your goggles and your mask that they fitted for you. I'll never forget the first day we went out there and they—I think I was the only woman initially on this committee. I think I was. I think that maybe ultimately another woman was appointed to this committee. But they couldn't get the mask to fit me—they didn't have one that was made for—

(A woman?)

For a woman's face. I'm like, no wonder they don't want women working around here. [Laughs.] Because—you know, just walking around that place and seeing things firsthand, and the information—

(Were you actually on the property or were you—)

Oh, yeah—

(—in the buffer zone, or—)

No we went inside, around those buildings. We saw the room with the canisters, and the—we were, we were shown everything. And walked around. And you just—

(You were taken inside buildings? Wow.)

Oh, yeah.

(That's amazing.)

And I kept pressing—

(I didn't realize that.)

—how are we going to move on the task force recommendations? And they would all look at me like I'd pulled their pants down or something. [Chuckles.]

(They didn't mean it? [?])

Yeah. I said, you know the Task Force says, "How are we going to move on this?" And then it became really obvious that Rockwell's and the DOE people were spending a lot of time showing us around and treating us like VIPs, right? And you could see the dynamic of people—

(They _____ real important?)

Yeah, we had our own little badges with our pictures and names on it when we would go to the plant, and you know, you saw one of the dynamics and why Congress themselves have a hard time overseeing these things, because these guys dazzle you with technicalities. The environment is so overwhelming and so—So the monitoring committee is a whole other story, part of the story _____.

(I've often wondered about—.)

30:11 [End of Part B]

[C]

00:00 LeRoy, I would offer to drive you up there but it's—

(Don't—)

—a zoo on a Sunday afternoon—

(Don't offer to do that.)

It would take me three hours, and I can't do that with _____.

(I don't want you to do that.)

I'd be happy if it was in the middle of the day.

Yeah. Don't even think about it. I never would have expected that sort of thing. Um—[pause.]

But then the next phase of this—the bureaucratic moves that government officials made to take the steam out of the movement, to sort of placate people, is another level that this thing needs to be commented on. Because the Task Force said it all, and then it's taken how many decades to even get that original recommendation, which was why—[Child interrupts]—wise and thoughtful to get implemented. It was just one, sort of, political evasion after another. In '79, the next rally—Blue Ribbon Committee—that's what they—from the monitoring committee we went to the Blue Ribbon Committee. And we were—we had another—this next demonstration—I remember, what we did was we went after Tim Wirth for not doing anything about this, and one of the caricatures that came out of him in the newspapers—one of the cartoons—was Tim Wirth, and there was a DOE target. And it said DOE Rocky Flats. And it had Tim Wirth throwing marshmallows at it. But—and this was also around the time when Bob McFarland was taking on Wirth, and he'd won by two percent or something like that, you know his congressional _____. And they came in the office and said, "You're going to be really happy with what Tim is going to do on Rocky Flats." And that's because he was going to recommend the Blue Ribbon Committee. And what it was going to be is have this big budget—

(One more study.)

One more study—but it's going to be a blue ribbon committee, and I'm like, [chuckles] enough of these studies. And Tim Wirth was the master at not—of, sleight of hand, not getting anything done on this. And yet he's the darling of the environmental movement. [Loud coughing.] You're getting worse, LeRoy. Do you need a decongestant for the plane?

(I don't know.)

You know it's not good to fly without one. You know that.

(Well, have you got something like that?)

Yeah. I'll get you something.

(I never take those things. I don't—)

I don't often.

(But it might be smart.) [Long pause.]

[Rep.Patricia] Schroeder was the only one who would step out and do anything. And she did it early on. She just said, "This is appalling," and she really helped us. And she helped at every stage, in the most practical and concrete ways. And then, part of this nationalizing, what we were doing at Rocky Flats, was to try to focus on—squirrel's eating my basil—was to focus on—give him a little olive oil and tomatoes there and [laughs] see what he does—we focused on

radiation victims. And we met and tried to collect—this is Mike Jendrzeczyk and I—the names of all the people who had been exposed, all the atomic vets, and ta-da-dum. And we came up with this idea of organizing the radiation victims' hearings, in Washington, and Schroeder essentially let us use her office as a base of operations to do this. And that brought medical and people from philosophy and medicine and politics and across the board—and labor organizers too—listened to the testimony of people who had been exposed. And that group still continues. Trying to organize. Maybe Cooper Brown. Was he at the meeting?

(Hmm?)

Cooper Brown—was he at the meeting?

4:46 (No. I don't know him.)

(Your comments about Wirth are interesting. [Rep.David] Skaggs—by the time we were meeting with Skaggs, he was—I think Skaggs—that he wanted to see Rocky Flats shut down from a safety perspective. But he was also possibly playing his cards to satisfy the power figures in the Democratic Party, it was very clear. But he was very skilled at it. _____. His staff was enormously helpful. He hired a person that did really good research and_____ Rocky Flats and _____ the FBI raid _____ permanently. He had a very good staff person that would send me stuff, stay in touch with me, and it was really valuable. So it was more valuable in terms of information than it was _____once in a while_____. He certainly—he seemed to understand that—the way the game needed to be played in Washington.)

So you and Tom Rauch really kind of carried this through—kept it going, through these last years—

(Yeah. That's true. And the peace center now has a young man that you don't know named Tom Marshall [?] who is incredibly good. Very very skilled organizer, and exceedingly thoughtful. He's a lot better than I am. I'm quite glad that—I don't think he knows the issue as deeply as I do, but I think he's a lot better at getting the local government people and workers and so on together on something. He works hard at that kind of thing. Quite a _____.)

(Well, anything else that you want to say about this? Anything that needs to be looked at that you haven't mentioned, you think?

Probably, but I don't know what it is. [Laughs.]

(Big issue.)

Yeah, it's a big issue with a long history. I think the things that are astounding is that it takes so long, and it takes so many people, to take on an issue like this. And why rebuilding civil society at the community level is so critical. Because a thing like Rocky Flats happens because the local citizens weren't aware. Weren't in power, and it was built behind our backs, in secrecy, and you know, this is the—you know, there are three pillars to our society, and—the civil society, and the

government and business—and if we don't strengthen the middle part then—the civil society—then we're doomed to more and more of these things. That's one point.

And the other point is—I guess I already made it—is just how incredibly long it takes. I mean, these things have twenty year cycles, and then you make a lot of progress in that twenty years, and then you start another twenty years, it seems to me. And that we don't have—we've got to figure out how to accelerate that.

(We certainly do, given the nature of the environmental problems that we confront.)

And now—

(We could talk about nothing else.)

Yeah, but now, LeRoy, it seems to me that the parallel to the kinds of environmental problems that we have is the decay of inner cities. And it's not just the decay, physically—that's the least part of it—but it's the moral depravity, and criminalization of black youth. And if we don't figure out how to do that, then we're going to have more kids, more violent, at a younger age. And it's—and then the concentration of wealth—we're going to have gated cities like Guatemala City. You know, the rich flying in and out of their helicopters, and have their little armies. So I think the new, the new radiation, really, is—what I was saying when we first started. The cities have been bombed out. Capitalism collapsed—I mean communism collapsed, but nobody's pointing toward the failure of communism—I mean, capitalism.

(I got a wonderful cartoon, right when the Berlin wall fell, and everything was coming apart over there. Some cartoonist showed these people looking at their spyglasses over into the Eastern European countries. And everything was falling apart around them; you know their whole urban environment was in decay. And they were saying “I can't understand what's—why everything would fall apart over there like it is.”)

Oh, that's great. [Interviewer chuckles.] That's a great cartoon.

(Yeah.)

10:19 [End of Part C. End of interview.]

