

LEROY MOORE. Born 1931.

TRANSCRIPT of OH 1118V A-B

This interview was recorded at Leroy Moore's home at 3360 14th Street, Boulder, CO, 80304, on November 4, 2002, for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program. The interviewer is Dorothy Ciarlo. This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Dorothy Ciarlo.

ABSTRACT: In this oral history, LeRoy Moore discusses his development as a peace activist, leading in particular to his deep involvement with the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons plant. He talks about his arrest as a protester at Rocky Flats in 1979 and his subsequent trial, the role of Gandhian non-violence in his work, the "encirclement" demonstration at Rocky Flats, and the creation of the "Citizens Guide to Rocky Flats." He also speaks about the fast he initiated in July 1989, to protest continued nuclear production at Rocky Flats. See also a later oral history with LeRoy Moore, OH 1387V A-B.

NOTE: Interviewer's questions and editorial comments appear in parentheses. Added material appears in brackets.

[A].

00:00 (This is an oral history with LeRoy Moore and we're meeting at his home in Boulder. The interviewer is Dorothy Ciarlo and this is for the Maria Rogers Oral History collection of the Carnegie Library. OK LeRoy, as I said, the first question is when and where were you born?)

Well, I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on the 7th of December, 1931, ten years to the day before the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. My family fairly soon thereafter moved from Nashville, Tennessee, to Dallas, Texas, so I really grew up in Texas in the city of Dallas. That's where I spent my childhood. I went to college in Texas at Baylor University. I went on to—I had grown up in a very religious environment, Southern Baptist for that matter, and I made a decision when I was in my teen years to go into the ministry, and I went to—after graduating from the University I went to theological school in California, in the Bay Area. It was a Southern Baptist seminary, there are many seminaries in the Bay Area and this one was located in Berkeley at that time.

I worked in a factory at night while I was going to seminary. I was a member of the union, working in that factory, making electrical power cables. My children were born in that period. Because I was working away, it took me six years to finish a three-year seminary degree. Then I went to graduate school at Claremont Graduate University in southern California near Los Angeles, and after I graduated from—finished my residence work, at least for my doctorate, I joined the faculty of the seminary from which I had graduated a few years before.

So it was in 1964 that I joined the faculty of the Golden Gate Baptist Seminary. By this time it had moved from Berkeley across the bay to Marin County to Mill Valley on a beautiful peninsula jutting into the bay—spectacular place. So I was teaching there, and in my second

year, 1966, I was fired from the faculty of that seminary for my very small involvement and support of the civil rights movement in the South. You weren't supposed to do that as a white Southerner, but I thought you were [Laughs]. And so I lost that job and I spent then a year teaching in Berkeley at the Graduate Theological Union and from there I then joined the faculty of a liberal Protestant seminary in New England, the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut—Hartford, Connecticut. I was there for several years, then moved into undergraduate teaching at the University of North Carolina.

In 19—what year was it—1974 I came to Colorado from Chapel Hill. I came to Colorado as a Visiting Professor at the University of Denver in Religious Studies and American Studies. So that's how I happened to get to Colorado. And I taught at the University of Denver for several years.

And in 1978—maybe you know this story—in 1978 a group of people occupied the railroad tracks at Rocky Flats nuclear bomb factory. And they blockaded those tracks, and they occupied them in April of 1978 and they decided to stay on the tracks and they set up camp there and eventually—the first people that moved onto the tracks were arrested by the federal authorities, and eventually put on trial. But after they were removed, other people came onto the tracks and what happened as a result of that was a yearlong sustained civil disobedience blockade of the railroad tracks leading into the Rocky Flats nuclear bomb factory. Well—

05:30 (Did you—you didn't have any role—?)

I had nothing to do with that.

(Were you aware of it at the time?)

The significance of it for me was that's how I learned about Rocky Flats. And I was, as I said, I was teaching at the University of Denver and I had become—

(What were you teaching?)

I was teaching American Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Denver. And I had become thoroughly politicized, I guess would be the word to use, by the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the environmental movement, the anti-war movement of the 1960s—I was involved and certainly informed by all of those things going on. And I had become quite convinced by about 1970—and it was informing all of my teaching— I had become quite convinced that humankind might not survive, and I thought there were three fundamental threats to ongoing human existence, and one of them was the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. The second was the possibility of an environmental disaster from which we would not recover. And the third was authoritarian or non-democratic forms of governance. And authoritarian and non-democratic forms of governance in fact intensify the first two threats, the possibility of nuclear holocaust and the possibility of environmental disaster.

When I learned—I was trying to get my students to face up to this danger to the human race, and—but I had no idea there was a nuclear bomb factory so close to Denver. And it was in 1978,

when people occupied the tracks out there, that I learned about Rocky Flats, and I immediately recognized that Rocky Flats represented all three of those threats in a very concentrated way. And within the months following my awareness about Rocky Flats, I walked out of the academic world, simplified the way I live, and began volunteering with the American Friends Service Committee in Denver on their Rocky Flats project. And I was cooking at minimum wage in a vegetarian restaurant to make a little bit of income, and volunteering with the American Friends Service Committee.

(So that was really quite a change!)

That was quite a change!

08:40 (Was that—you didn't say anything about your family of origin, in terms of what their beliefs were. Was this a big—had you made a big shift in terms of—?)

Well, yeah, and let me—in fact—it was a big shift, and it was not what they expected. But when I was a child—well, when I was 16 years old, I put a stop to my father's violence toward me. By that time—there had been a pattern of escalating violence, especially directed at me, of the six children that my father and mother had had. My mother had died when I was quite young, and my father had remarried by this time. Well, when I was 16 years old, by that time my father was using a rubber hose about five feet long, and he would loop it over, and it was a garden hose, and he would beat me with that hose, and for relatively minor cause. I was not really, I think by anybody's measure, I wouldn't quite qualify as a bad kid. But for relatively minor things and—

(Do you know why he singled you out?)

Well, do I know why he singled me out—he had given me his name, I was the first male child after four females, and then there was a second male child, my brother, born after myself. I think he had high expectations. He didn't know better than to use overpowering force. I mean, my gosh, the United States Government doesn't know better than to do that. We plan to go to war soon, perhaps, against Iraq, because we want to control them. And my father was trying to control my behavior, and he used—he escalated his weapons from a little switch that he would use when I was very small through a series of them until finally he was using a rubber hose—fortunately nothing worse than that.

And I decided in the spur of the moment when I was 16, on a given night, and he had ordered me to throw myself down on the bed so he could hit me with that hose. And I made a decision that I didn't have to take that anymore, and so I refused. And then ensued a struggle in which he tried to force me down.

11:51 Now I want to go back though to answer—try to answer your question. He himself had grown up in a very, very large family in north Texas where his father, my grandfather, who had died before I was born so I never knew the man—treated him that way and treated all his boys that way. He was very, very severe, very harsh. And my father's mother tried to compensate apparently. He was the last of 13 children, and he told—my father told me at one point—long after all of this I would go back and see him and try to get him to tell stories about himself—and

I asked him about his mother, and his eyes got real dreamy and he looked off into space, and he said, “She was the sweetest thing that ever was.” And she told him when he was very little that she was just going to spoil the pants off of him because he was the last boy that she was ever going to have and she was really going to let him have whatever he wanted.

And so I think the combination of that harsh treatment of his own father and that kind of unusually indulgent treatment by his mother must have made him think that first of all, he needed to exercise violence to try to control his own kids, and he especially focused on me, less on the girls and less on my younger brother. And he also was a bitter and unhappy man because the world didn't treat him like his mother had. Things didn't quite work out so well. I learned an awful lot about the things that made him bitter and unhappy because I, as I said, I went back when I was older. I went back and asked him questions to try to get him to tell me about himself so I could understand what had made him so angry.

But I didn't have—I didn't understand those things when I was sixteen. I just knew that I wanted to try to put a stop to my father's use of that rubber hose. And on that particular night, when he was trying to force me onto the bed so he could hit me with that hose—this was in Dallas, Texas, going on the first of June, it must have been 85 or 90 degrees and the humidity was almost as high as the temperature, and the sweat was pouring out of his body as he was trying to force me down. And I put my arms around his neck and hung myself, sort of dead weight down the front of his body while he was trying to force me onto the bed. And in a little bit he just—went limp, he lost all of his energy, and when he did I released my arms from around his neck and stepped back. And he told me at that point that I was not fit to be his child and he wanted me to leave the house. Which I actually did the next day, I went to a friend's house. But before nightfall my father was driving there to pick me up, even to invite my friend to come home and spend the night with me, the only time that ever happened. So—but I had put a stop to my father's quite unjustified and unnecessary violence—what we would today of course, what we've learned to call child abuse. He was engaged in his own version of it, not really—not knowing better. He wasn't an evil man, I don't think. I think it was all that he knew to do. It's like the United States is not necessarily an evil country, but we don't know better than to beat other countries around and think we can control them.

So—and the two stories sort of came together. In 1978 after I learned about Rocky Flats and I began to volunteer with the American Friends Service Committee, one of the very first things I did, connected with Rocky Flats, was engage in civil disobedience. In April of 1979, I found myself sitting on the tracks with about 300 other people at Rocky Flats in a civil disobedience action. And in preparation for that civil disobedience, we had a non-violence training. And we were divided up into small groups and I went through the non-violence training and there were several exercises that we did as part of the training. I since have conducted numerous non-violence trainings and this particular exercise—which I'm going to mention—is one that we still routinely used when we do non-violence training for people that are preparing to do some kind of direct action—on all kinds of issues, not just nuclear weapons, but all kinds of issues.

One of the exercises is something called “dead weight.” And it's where when—suppose you're sitting on the tracks at Rocky Flats and somebody in your group or somebody that comes in from off the street or some drunk who's angry at what you're doing, or even an officer of the law may

come and want to—and sort of lose it, and want to start attacking people and engage in some harm against those that are doing behavior that this person really disagrees with. So what would you do in a situation like this? We try to do some role plays, and one of the role plays is “dead weight.” And the idea—and we put this into practice, we have people practice it—the idea is that a much smaller person can actually stop the harm that’s perhaps intended by a larger person by putting her or his arms around the person’s neck and just hanging and lifting the feet off the floor and surprising that person—

18:49 (And you had done that instinctively when you were sixteen?)

I had done it quite spontaneously. I had no—I certainly had no non-violence training. I didn’t know there was such a thing. I never heard of Mohandas Gandhi or you know, that sort of thing. Mohandas Gandhi in fact died right around the time I did this, I realize now. He was assassinated. And it was later that I learned about Gandhi.

And one of the ingredients in my own thinking when I learned about Rocky Flats was that the only way to engage in political struggle, or effort to change things that people find unjust toward themselves or toward others is non-violence; non-violent direct action. And that you need to find, not only non-violent resistance to behavior you don’t like, but you also need to engage those that you disagree with in a non-violent interaction, a refusal to take up arms and a decision instead to use words. And to learn from each other, to try to understand, why do those people want this, why are they trying to do that? And give them the opportunity also to understand you.

So I had become a very, very deeply committed Gandhian by the time I learned about Rocky Flats. So I brought all of that into that activity at the time. And sure enough, when we did the role play in preparation for the civil disobedience, one of the actions that we—one of the role plays was “dead weight.” Well, when I did that exercise that day in April of 1979, the tears just burst out of my eyes because it brought back my spontaneous childhood experience when I was only 16 years old, and I put a stop to my father’s violence.

I did see the line, the direct line from my father’s own attempt to control and to have his own kinds of weapons, the most extreme one that he used within the household was that rubber hose. I saw that there was certainly a continuity from that pattern to a government that decides it’s got to make weapons of mass destruction, and even to use them as the United States did on two occasions. And it still has huge arsenals of them. So my involvement with Rocky Flats was really in opposition to weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons.

And very soon after doing that civil disobedience, for which I was arrested and eventually tried in the Federal Court in Denver and found guilty of trespass, had to pay a fine and all of that—

22:12 (That was with the group?)

That was with the group, yeah, there were about 300 people that were arrested on that particular occasion, and we were tried in Federal Court in smaller groups. But—and that was an education in itself, to go into the judicial system and to find out how arbitrary it is. The judge had, for instance, told us that we could not tell the jury why we did what we did. The only question was

for the jury to decide whether or not we had trespassed by going onto the Rocky Flats property. It didn't—we were not supposed to talk about nuclear weapons. We were not supposed to talk about environmental or health problems related to the production of nuclear weapons at Rocky Flats. We were not supposed to do that.

In fact, I was defending myself—when you go into court you can, if you choose, you can take a pro se argument or position and be your own—in effect your own attorney and that gives you the opportunity as an individual to cross-examine witnesses that the prosecution may bring forward. And they had the head of Security, a man named Sonny Crews, who was at the time the head of security at Rocky Flats, he was on the stand testifying, and I decided I would cross-examine him. And I usually am such a Texas or Tennessee speaker, I speak so slowly—but I decided I needed to try to ask a question to Sonny Crews, so I asked him two or three things: if he was really familiar with the Rocky Flats site, did he know it quite thoroughly, of course he did. Then I said, “well, Sonny, is it true that sometimes the Rocky Flats workers are told not to come into the East Gate because of the contamination over there?” [Laughs] And I asked him that question quickly like that. And before I was done with the question, the judge was banging his gavel down and rising up from his seat and pointing his finger at me and threatening me with contempt of court, and I said while he was doing this, I said—he said I was not to ask this kind of question in this courtroom, and I said, “Thank you, your majesty” and turned and sat down, while he was standing there staring at me!

So it infuriated him that I tried to put a little—give the jury a little bit of information that I thought they might not otherwise have. Sonny Crews, of course, was not required to answer the question.

And I don't know if that was true. I had heard that, and I suspect it had to do with the 903 pad and some of the contamination on the east side of the site, that sometimes the workers were not allowed to enter on that side. Well—

(What was that experience like for you? It sounds like it was very frustrating, not to be able to talk about why you were protesting?)

Oh, sure, that was enormously frustrating. And it was very, very revealing to find that—you think the judicial system is going to be one of ultimate fairness, absolute fairness, and that you're going to really be able to influence the jury by helping them to understand why you did what you did and why maybe even international law is on your side, not to say ethics. And judicial—legal decisions are not made on the basis of ethics, they're made on the basis of law, so it might make a whole lot of difference if you can convince a jury that the United States, in continuing to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, is in violation of treaties that it has agreed to.

So I was—it was really fascinating to learn [Laughs] to learn what the—how the system operated, and I realized—it was such a revelation because I realized there are a lot of people in this country, especially people of color in this country, that are likely to find themselves charged with some crime and they have to deal with this system that can be so easily stacked against them. And that was a revelation in itself. I'm grateful for the experience. That wasn't the only

time I've been in court, that was the first time. And I've done civil disobedience on a number of other occasions. And that's an important thing to learn about, how the system operates.

28:00 (When you made that decision to leave your teaching job and change your way of life, was it—had you made the decision at that point that you wanted to be an activist rather than a professor?)

Oh, I was ripe for it. And I had been thinking about it for so long, and I had come to the conclusion already independently, thinking about Gandhi's methods of massive civil disobedience, and the enormous effect that they had on trying to get independence—national independence for the country of India from the British government. Very successful effort. I had become quite convinced that these dangerous weapons that I was concerned about, nuclear weapons, could in fact be ended if enough people engaged in kind of Gandhian direct action, on a large scale. So I believed that very strongly, and once I realized, my goodness, people are actually trying to do that right here. It was just that the door—they opened the door for me, it was so easy to step through it, it was quite a, almost like—I won't call it natural but it was almost like a natural movement to do that. I was ready for it, and I had thought about it so much, and it was not traumatic at all. It was the thing to do, though it created some trauma in my life and for those near to me and so on.

But regarding teaching, around that time I also looked at the catalogues of the universities in the Denver area and I realized that nobody so far as I could tell, except possibly at the Boulder campus—and I lived in Denver then—the Boulder campus of the University of Colorado—no one was teaching courses on non-violent social change. So I proposed to the Political Science Department at the University of Colorado in Denver that I introduce a course on Non-Violent Social Change, focused especially on the United States and thinking of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, and Cesar Chavez, and the Catholic Worker Movement, and activities for abolition in the 19th century, and women's movement, you know a lot of illustrations or examples of it.

And the course was accepted, so in the summer of 1980 I began—I went back into the university setting and began to offer courses on Non-Violent Social Change. And a few years later, 1983, I was—I had moved from Denver to Boulder, and I continued to offer this course at UCD, University of Colorado at Denver, but fairly soon I was asked to teach on the Boulder campus. So I was never again a regular faculty member, but I taught as an adjunct faculty person and from the time I started offering courses on non-violent social change on the Boulder campus until I retired from doing that in 1997, every year I would offer one or two, sometimes three courses on this issue. And typically I was doing it in small specially created academic programs where the students were kind of self-selected to want to do this kind of study.

32:22 So I had these incredibly well-motivated wonderful, wonderful students in very small groups, maybe a dozen or fifteen students in a class. And it was a very rich experience to get to introduce them to non-violence and its relationship to democracy, by which I mean not representative democracy but a system where the people affected are actually making the decisions about the things that affect them.

And that kind of takes me into another of the themes that's so important about the issue of Rocky Flats and the Department of Energy and weapons of mass destruction. To make weapons of mass destruction, you really require a centralized command structure and you require a lot of secrecy and you require shutting the public out. And maybe that would be all right if nobody was doing any harm. But you're building weapons of mass destruction, which if they're ever used will be horrible. They have been used of course.

And they cannot be built without hurting the people that build them. The workers, the workforce at a place like Rocky Flats, getting exposed to plutonium and other toxins, and so they're health may be destroyed. Or beryllium—a lot of workers at Rocky Flats have beryllium exposure, berylliosis now. So the work force gets exposed, but then the people that live around the facility are likely to be exposed. There were major accidents at Rocky Flats that released plutonium and other things into the physical environment. And we don't have any idea, I don't think, I don't think the studies that have been done show adequately at a realistic level what has happened to the health of people around a facility like Rocky Flats.

So this problem anyway of exposure to this dangerous material, this is involuntary exposure. This is involuntary harm to people's health. Now maybe it's voluntary on the part of the workers, if the workers are really well-informed about what they're getting into. And I know you've interviewed a lot of workers and some of them have probably told you that they didn't realize, they were never—it was never explained to them that beryllium could—working around beryllium with very little protective gear could end up endangering their health. And some of them now are living with the results of that exposure. The plutonium was recognized to be much more dangerous, or very dangerous, and more protective measures were taken for exposure to that material, but even then, perhaps the workers didn't understand the full measure of the danger that they were facing.

And some of them of course now have died. Some of them are in very bad health. Some of them are continuing even as we speak, in the cleanup activities going on now to be exposed to this material. So it's—should those people—back to the question of democracy, should those people have some real voice, should the people living in the area have some real voice in what is done to us? Should we have some voice in what we will be exposed to? Should we have some voice in setting the standards for what's OK for exposure? The language that the government uses is language of permissible exposure.

I have become a, as a result of this Rocky Flats stuff, I have become a very, very close student of radiation and in particular radiation from plutonium.

36:51 (Would this be a good time for you to show me—?)

I can show you this photograph right here. [photograph displayed on interview videotape]

(I think we can put this on camera very easily.)

You want to get this into focus? This—I have in my hands here a photograph—here's a photograph of a single particle of plutonium in the lung tissue of an ape. This photograph,

magnified 500 times, is a photograph of a very small portion of lung tissue in an ape, and that star right there is a particle of plutonium. And this is a time-lapse photograph taken over a period of 48 hours. And what it shows is that the little speck of plutonium there, too small to see, is exploding, and giving off alpha radiation which is a very weak form of radiation. If I had plutonium right here, it wouldn't—the alpha radiation would not go through this sheet of paper, or it wouldn't go through the skin on my hand. But once you get it inside your body, it radiates and possibly affects the surrounding cells. And over—a speck like that staying in somebody's body for twenty or thirty years may result in cancer. It may affect that person's chromosome makeup and be passed on as genetic harm to future generations. It may affect that person's immune system and therefore make the person exposed to it more susceptible to other diseases other than cancer.

So it's a very dangerous material, this plutonium we're talking about, it's a very dangerous material. And very, very small amounts that are far smaller, of course, than the standards that are set—standards for permissible exposure would say that well, we won't worry about a few particles getting into the body, either being inhaled or ingested or taken in through, say, a cut or wound in the body. And it's a gamble. Maybe the person who takes that into his body or her body is not harmed by it at all. But on the other hand, maybe that person will be harmed. Or maybe that person's children or future generations will be harmed, because of that very small, tiny exposure. So that health issue, when I learned about it, became really the heart of the issue.

40:11 (That to you is even more central than the production of weapons of mass destruction?)

Well, it's not separate. The two are so linked together. I remember that Admiral Watkins—James Watkins, when he was Secretary of Energy during the Administration of the first President Bush, Admiral Watkins used to say that the—he used to say that the activists are using the environmental and health issue to try to halt production because they're really opposed to nuclear bomb production, they're not really concerned about the health issue.

Well he was absolutely wrong. He was just wrong. There may be people that fit his description, but I think most of us—and I know a lot of these people—are quite, quite upset and concerned about the health question and the effects of radiation—invisible, no taste, you don't know when you're inhaling a particle of plutonium that may be wafting in the breeze, you don't know that. It's been an education to me to learn about the danger of that material.

And I guess I've even gotten some reputation, evidently, for having paid so much attention to it. Enough that I—two or three years ago was appointed to a sub-committee of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements, and this is a U.S.-based organization which studies the radiation question and makes—publishes results of studies and makes proposals or recommendations that may then be adopted by government agencies for how to protect people from—

(So you're—it sounds like you're really considered an expert on—?)

Well, I don't know about an expert, but at least it's known that I'm concerned about the question. I don't think of myself as an expert, I think of myself as having gone through a very steep learning curve, and has learned a lot about this issue.

(Is that organization that you were just speaking of connected with the government in any sense?)

It receives some funding from the government, it's not directly a government agency. But it works a lot for the government agencies and makes recommendations to organizations like the Department of Energy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the various state governments, the Environmental Protection Agency.

43:38 (Going back a ways, you mentioned before that you were very centrally involved in starting the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center.)

Yeah. Um—

(Did that come about relating to Rocky Flats?)

Well, it did. In 1983—I had moved to Boulder in 1982—actually to Nick Helbern's farm, a little ways north of town. I lived there briefly, and then—but by 1982, '83 I was—I had moved from Denver to Boulder. And the person whose name is Chet Tchozewski, who lived in Boulder and had been working for the American Friends Service Committee, I knew Chet very well—he and I and four other people got into a conversation about starting a grass roots peace organization in Boulder. And we—and it turned out that in the fall of 1983, we started what is now called the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center. And it was started by this half dozen people, and we all knew each other—three men and three women, we all knew each other because we had worked together on the Rocky Flats issue. But the Rocky Mountain Peace Center was going to have a focus not simply on Rocky Flats, the central issue for us was violence and non-violence. And so we created an organization that had a commitment to non-violence as a way of life and as a means for social change. And the organization has continued since then, since 1983—will be twenty years old next year. We've had a constant focus on Rocky Flats.

We started right at the time of the big encirclement of Rocky Flats, I think it was maybe even the very same month. That happened in October, 1983. It was a rather incredible demonstration. I referred earlier to civil disobedience at Rocky Flats where people blocked the roads, or blocked the railroad to try to stop the movement of trucks or transport in and out of that facility and were arrested for that. There were many legal demonstrations where big rallies were held, and people would make speeches and music and testify to their opposition to what was going on at Rocky Flats by means of their presence there.

In addition to that, in 1983, October 1983 was this very, very large demonstration at Rocky Flats itself in which we estimated 17 or 18,000 people gathered around the perimeter of that facility. It's roughly sixteen or seventeen miles around that facility on the roads, around the fence that surrounds the buffer zone of Rocky Flats. And people gathered all the way around there holding hands. We had, we thought, enough people to encircle the whole facility, but they were kind of

bunched up at the West Gate and also at the East Gate rather than uniformly spread out, so there were some gaps, especially over in the southeastern part of the site. I happened to be over there. I was a peacekeeper for the day and I remember that we had a couple of gaps of maybe, I don't know, a quarter of a mile or something like that, where—or a couple of city blocks, where people were—where there was an open space between the people holding hands over here and those holding hands over there.

But people assembled, holding hands, encircling a nuclear bomb factory that they said should be closed. But there were no speeches and no program except at a given moment, you could turn on the radio and listen to radio station KGNU from Boulder and KGNU played on the radio an announcement that now we will play taps. And then a person with a trumpet played taps. And it went out over the radio, and people encircling the facility had a few radios here and there so you could hear the sound of the trumpet playing taps as you held hands with those to your right and those to your left. And then absolute silence except for the wind, and occasionally the sound of a bird, and of course the helicopters that were flying overhead from the TV stations and the government agencies. But it was an incredible moment, it was still, quiet—beautiful. One of the most beautiful, maybe the most beautiful political demonstration that I think I've ever participated in.

50:04 We at the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center—which we were just at that time creating our organization, helped to organize that event. Those that—that small group but it was—there were a lot of people involved, in planning it and organizing it. After a few minutes of silence there, people left and went their way back to where they'd come from. But an expression had been made to the United States government, to the Department of Energy, to the people of Colorado, to the people of the country, indeed to people of Western Europe and the Soviet Union where at that very time a lot of these weapons were being—that had been made at Rocky Flats were being positioned in Europe and aimed at the Soviet Union to be able to strike that country within a matter of minutes if there was a war. And it was a demonstration that had such a beautiful quality about it, but it also, I think, had an enormous impact beyond just right there.

Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center was just then coming into existence, and that very fall we moved into the basement of the Boulder Mennonite Church—what's now the Boulder Mennonite Church. In those days, it was still called the Center for—there was an ecumenical program of ministry and higher education that owned the building, and they later, about a year later sold it to the Mennonites who started the Boulder Mennonite Church in that building and they're still there. But the Peace and Justice Center rented an office in there. That was our first act, and we pretty soon began to have some study groups and training sessions and so on. And we were always focused on Rocky Flats. We've also, being a—we purposefully created an organization devoted to non-violence that would work on other issues, other than simply Rocky Flats.

(I believe at some point in your—perhaps it was later, you conducted a fast with respect to Rocky Flats?)

Oh. Well—

(Was that at a later time?)

First off, let me just say as background to that, over the years from 1983 forward when the Peace and Justice Center was created, we prepared people for civil disobedience at Rocky Flats on a number of occasions. And there were numerous examples of people sitting usually at the West Gate or at the East Gate engaged in civil disobedience. And civil disobedience always means that people are deliberately breaking a law in order to uphold a higher law, whether that's a law of religious belief or a law of ethical concern, or whether it's a treaty law of the country. So civil disobedience, anyway, has that character about it. And we were a rather distinct organization at the time in that we were quite committed to that kind of activity and engaged in it, prepared people to engage in it a lot. Over the years—

(May I—I'm going to interrupt you now because I need to change the tape.)

OK.

(So can you remember your thoughts?)

Yeah, I'll remember right where I am.

(OK.)

54:25 [End of Tape A.]

[B].

00:00 (This is a continuation of an oral history with LeRoy Moore for the Carnegie Library's Oral History Project. The interviewer is Dorothy Ciarlo and we're talking about Rocky Flats and related subjects.)

So I was saying that when the Peace Center came into existence, that we prepared people for non-violent civil disobedience. We also did, of course, many legal demonstrations and we did a lot of public education. We produced "The Citizens Guide to Rocky Flats." The first issue was produced in, I think, 1987.

(Could you describe that just real briefly?)

Well, that's a handbook of information. When I became involved with Rocky Flats back in 1979, there was a small pamphlet that was probably six or eight pages long, called "Local Hazard, Global Threat." That was the wonderful language that people at the American Friends Service Committee had come up with to describe the nature of Rocky Flats as they understood it: a local hazard, a global threat. And they put together most of the information that they knew at the time about the facility. And one of the fascinating things about Rocky Flats is, is how difficult it was,

especially back then, to get good, solid information. And just to realize that it was a nuclear bomb factory was a revelation to a lot of people.

But by that time it had become known—and that's a story in itself, maybe you've got it on some of your interviews—it had become known that there had been several major accidents that had released plutonium into the physical environment over the city of Denver in the area around Rocky Flats, on the site itself, and that they had tried to take measures to correct those problems, and not terribly successfully. And those accidents, the first two major accidents at Rocky Flats, were not even known by the Colorado State Government until 1970 when it was revealed, finally. That's a story in itself.

But the—what was your question, now, let's see—

(The question—we had been leading up to talking about your fast.)

Yeah, but you were—then you had a preliminary question, I thought that you had just asked me about something at Rocky Flats, and I was referring to the fact that we had prepared people for direct action—oh, The Citizens Guide. When I first got involved in Rocky Flats, there was a very small handbook that was called “Local Hazard, Global Threat” that didn't—that had incredible information but not a whole lot of information. And over time we began to learn more and more. And the American Friends Service Committee put together a slide show, which was used in schools and churches and civic groups and so on. When the Peace and Justice Center started, we soon put together a slide show of our own that tried to introduce the issue of Rocky Flats and nuclear weapons production to people, so—and that was used as an educational tool.

03:47 (So, in a sense, you were doing what one would have expected the press to do in terms of giving information?)

That's right. And the press began to pay more attention from 1970 forward. They—once it became known that there had been major releases of radioactive material into the environment, especially plutonium particles, the press began to pay a lot more attention. And then when the demonstrations happened, that created opportunities for the press to pay more attention to the—why are these people doing what they're doing, look how many people are involved, and so on. And so it's always been an educational matter, to educate oneself and try to educate others and to learn more.

And by the mid-'80s, we had a lot more information. We at the Peace and Justice Center by that time we were becoming one of the major organizations in the Denver area focused on Rocky Flats. We had a graduate student at the University of Colorado, write the first edition of The Citizens Guide to Rocky Flats. And that was revised enormously. That—I think that version was eighteen pages long, in 1987. In 1992, I and a small group of other people did a second edition which has about 85 pages, large format, relatively small type with illustrations and maps and so on. That showed the enormous growth in the information that we had, how much we were learning about the facility. And we knew a whole lot more in 1992 than we knew in 1987. And by now we know dozens of times, I mean the information has just proliferated in this last decade

at Rocky Flats. Enormous, enormous quantities of information are now publicly available, most of which used to be withheld from us.

That's a story in itself, how information has changed and how much more the public knows about a facility that's certainly had an effect on people—involuntary effect on people over all these years. Well, in—by the late 1980s Rockwell Incorporated was the contractor there. The original contractor had been Dow Chemical, and they were replaced in the mid-'70s by Rockwell. And Rockwell was in charge during the period of the Reagan years when there was an enormous buildup in nuclear weapons production in the United States, and Rocky Flats was right at the center of that making the plutonium pit for every nuclear weapon in the U.S. arsenal.

Well, on the 6th of June, 1989—you must have some discussions of this in your other interviews—on the 6th of June, 1989, the Rocky Flats facility was raided by the FBI and agents from the Environmental Protection Agency. And they raided that facility to collect evidence that in the operations of Rocky Flats they were violating federal law. They were violating federal environmental law, like the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act—laws that applied supposedly to all industry in the United States and it applied, and should be applied to a nuclear weapons facility operated by the United States Government as well as—or at least owned by the United States Government and operated by the big corporation, Rockwell. They raided there to collect information that they were in violation of the environmental laws, and that the facility was very, very unsafe. Well, a few days after that—that was an enormous scandal, you know—

08:40 (Did that come as a surprise to you?)

—a real turning point. It didn't come as a surprise that they were violating the law, no.

(No, I mean the raid.)

But certainly the raid, that was a huge surprise and really a slap in the face to the Department of Energy and an enormous scandal for the nuclear weapons production activities in the United States, for one federal agency to raid another. Well, about a few days after that raid, a half a dozen of us went to see Governor Romer, Roy Romer, who was then Governor of Colorado. And we asked Governor Romer to issue an appeal to the federal government asking them to stop production at Rocky Flats until the facility could be shown to be safe. Well, we knew, as we reminded him, that he didn't have the power to halt production at Rocky Flats. But we also knew, as we told him, that he had enormous moral authority in the state of Colorado, and he would have it in the country if he took the action we were requesting. We simply requested that he, the governor, make a simple statement that production should be halted at Rocky Flats until it could be demonstrated that it was safe to operate the facility. Very simple thing.

Well, it was pretty clear, the way the conversation went with him that day, it was pretty clear that he was not going to make such a recommendation to the federal government. We were disappointed. I was disappointed. Though we asked him to consider this, and please to make such a statement by the 4th of July. The FBI raid had happened on the 6th of June, we must have been talking to him on maybe the 11th or 12th of June, a few days later, and we asked him please to make his appeal to the federal government by the 4th of July. Well, we didn't expect when we

walked out of there that he was going to do it. We were pretty—I thought he had made it pretty clear that he wasn't going to do that.

Well, we talked about it in the Rocky Mountain Peace Center. How should we respond? What should we do after the 4th of July? That was the spring of the Tiananmen Square massacre, as it turned out, in China, in which several hundred Chinese students opposing the policies of their own government had conducted a sit-in in the square at Tiananmen Square in the capital city of Beijing, and they engaged in a fast while they were there. [They] ended up being slaughtered when the instructions were given to the Army to go out there and fire on them, so that who knows how many were killed. That was one of the striking examples of non-violent action in the late twentieth century, and I think that one should not even say it was ineffective just because so many people were killed. I don't think we know yet the enormous effect that that demonstration had in that country and beyond.

13:22 But nevertheless anyway, fasting—I had considered fasting, and I had done some fasting related to Rocky Flats back in 1985, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We had a peace camp. We rented a little bit of land from a rancher, just off—very near the West Gate, on the other side of the road out there, near Rocky Flats. And we set up a camp and some of us camped there for about ten days. And we had events, we had people come out and give talks, or make music. Allen Ginsberg came out one night and read poetry, read his famous poem, “Plutonium Ode”, which is really dedicated to the efforts to shut down Rocky Flats. It was a poem about Rocky Flats.

During that ten-day period I fasted—I wasn't publicizing it but I was fasting, and it was the first time I had done that, in a deliberately political way. I had considered, in that very year, engaging in an open-ended fast opposed to nuclear weapons, and ask the government—and announce that I would fast until they stopped producing nuclear weapons in the United States, my own government. I had considered that and I was ready to do it, actually. I decided not to at that time.

Well, in 1989 I began to think again about fasting if Governor Romer didn't ask the government to halt production at Rocky Flats until it could be demonstrated to be safe. I thought, well, maybe I will fast and I will say that I'm going to fast until they stop producing at Rocky Flats—an open-ended fast. And that was—I made that decision that way, initially. And then, the more I thought about it, and here's where Gandhi's influence was so important—I realized that Gandhi—I had studied Gandhi's fasts, he engaged in political fasting a number of times—and typically Gandhi's fasting was to change the behavior of his friends or allies rather than the people on the opposite side. Only one time did he fast against the behavior of a British authority, and he regretted that almost as soon as he had started it. And pretty soon he withdrew from that fast.

And I thought, I should not fast in a way that coerces Governor Romer or anybody else. So I'm not going to engage in an open-ended fast. And that—and I was talking to a small group of people at the time, some in the Peace and Justice Center, and some in a group that we used to call the Monday Group. For about ten years, there was a small group that met every Monday afternoon in the lounge at the Mennonite Church, there where the Peace Center is located—and we'd spend an hour and a half in contemplation and conversation, about half our time in silence

and half our time in conversation. It was kind of a—what might be called a spiritual support group for the people in the group.

And I spent a lot of time talking to the people in that group about this fast idea. And finally decided to conduct a fast from the 5th of July, begin it the 5th of July, until the 9th of August. And that would encompass July 16th, the anniversary of the Trinity bomb, the first nuclear explosion in the desert in New Mexico; August 6th, the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima; August 9th, the anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki—have a fast in that period, and I think that was about 36 days. And I was going to do a water-only fast and call it a fast of sorrow and solidarity with the victims of Rocky Flats. And being quite aware or quite deliberate about using that term to refer to the workers at Rocky Flats that were harmed by what they were doing, but also to potential victims of Rocky Flats should those weapons that were made there ever be used in war.

18:48 And so that's the kind of fast that was initiated. And it was a fast not asking Romer to do a thing. No request was made of anybody. It was simply a fast making a statement that we had made a request of Governor Romer and this is what had happened, he had not acted on it, or he had turned it down, and so I was fasting to call attention to the problem of Rocky Flats and what they were doing, at a time when there was a lot of attention to Rocky Flats.

Well, the fast began on the morning of the fifth of July, on the lawn of the State Capitol in Denver. And I made arrangements to stay at night with people that lived not far from the Capitol, and come there by 7AM every morning, early in the morning, stay there until late in the day. And people came. Some days there would be big groups of people that would come there, some days a few. Every morning some people would always come and we would start the day with an hour of meditation. And I had a book there collecting signatures; hundreds of people signed that book. They came from all over the United States, from many other countries. We would engage them in conversation about why we were there, what the fast was about.

I was taking water only and, Dorothy, it is literally true that I have never felt better in my life than when I was fasting. I was physically exceedingly well-prepared for it, and mentally and spiritually exceedingly well prepared for it. I studied carefully what I needed to do, and I moved into the fast very deliberately and gradually, and then by the morning of the fifth of July I was ready to initiate the fast with nothing but water from that point forward.

There was a local doctor named Paul Klite, he lived a couple of blocks away, he was a long-time friend of mind, also an activist, he'd walked out of the medical profession and gotten involved in his own forms of action, environmental action and so on. And he came to see me every day and checked my pulse and just sort of gave me a sort of look-over, careful, to see how I was, and took me through some physical exercises every day. It was wonderful to have him do that. And there was a nurse, Beverly Lyne, that came to see me very, very often and did the same sorts of things, suggested at one point that I should start taking salt tablets. That was the one way I modified what I was taking into my body, was to take a little bit of salt along with the water.

22:28 Well, you may remember that there was a Buddhist monk, named Sawada [Gyoshen], who lived in Boulder, he lives in the mountains above the town here. Sawada is a Japanese

monk, Buddhist monk, who is part of an order of monks that have positioned themselves around nuclear weapons facilities and Rocky Flats was his mission. He located in this town to provide a kind of presence and a spiritual focus constantly on Rocky Flats. And so Sawada in that time became a kind of figure in Boulder. He would be walking the streets in his yellow robe and his white head-covering with a drum, and he would beat this drum and chant a prayer over and over as he went marching along. When we would have walks to Rocky Flats, which we did from time to time, often at the head of the march to Rocky Flats, from Boulder out to Rocky Flats, would be Sawada, marching along the highway with his drum and his strong voice.

Well, Sawada was not in town when the fast began, and I wrote him a note and told him I was initiating this fast, and if he came to town I hoped he would come and join me and anybody that was there. Many people had joined the fast. Some would come and fast for two or three days, and some would come for two or three hours. Well, one day I was sitting there on the lawn at a high place where you could look out across that big plaza in downtown Denver, and I saw way off down the street, I heard this beating sound of drum and I saw Sawada walking from a distance there, and he came up and came closer, and came and sat down and joined me. He had returned to Colorado from wherever he had been. And so he began to participate in the fast and after a few days he asked me if I would break my fast and let him take up the fast and continue it until the terminal date of 9th of August. So I agreed to do that.

And so after the—on the 24th day of my fast, I drank a glass of prune juice in front of the Capitol and broke my fast and Sawada assumed it and continued. And then I would go and visit him and sit with him, but he did the fast from that point on.

So that happened and every day during that time there was a radio station in Denver—I don't remember the call letters at this point, but there was an announcer that would call me up and have somebody come out there and talk to me sitting in front of the Capitol early every morning. And he wanted to talk to me about Rocky Flats while the people were driving to work in Denver. And he would get me on the radio station almost every day. And this guy kept trying to get me to say nasty things about Governor Romer or about the Department of Energy or whatever and I was quite determined I wasn't going to do that. I was just going to try to be straightforward about what I saw happening and why I was doing what I was doing and wasn't happy with the fact that they were continuing in production at Rocky Flats.

26:47 That was 1989. Now it wasn't long after that—that was in July and August of '89 that I referred to, and by November of that year, Admiral Watkins, who was then the Secretary of Energy, halted production at Rocky Flats and announced that the factory would be shut down temporarily and they would soon resume production as soon as they got things straightened out. Well, and as we know now, they never got back into production at Rocky Flats. And there were efforts made over the next two years—I think the Department of Energy spent about a billion dollars each of the next two years—1990, 1991, trying to get Rocky Flats back into production. They even announced a couple of times in that two years, they gave a date and they said on so-and-so date Rocky Flats will resume production. Well, the date came and passed and they did not resume production. They were not able to do it.

And in that time, we in the activist community were doing a bunch of things. We were certainly paying attention to the members of Congress—David Skaggs in the House of Representatives, Pat Schroeder in the House of Representatives, and Tim Wirth in the Senate at the time. Those three especially, we were paying a lot of attention to. And not just us but many people in Colorado were saying we didn't really want Rocky Flats to continue here.

And one of the things that the Department of Energy was trying to do was to get a particular building back into operation. And that was building 371, the building where now, as we speak, all of the plutonium on the site is stored there. That's the newest of the major production buildings at Rocky Flats. It opened in the early '80s. It was built—a very expensive building when they built it, and on the day they opened that building they had a—maybe you've seen the videotape or the film of the celebration they had, whoever was Secretary of Energy at the time was there in the building, and they had a big crowd and they had a robot that moved forward with big scissors to cut the ribbon to open the building. Well, the robot malfunctioned and the ribbon could not be cut and the ribbon finally fell to the floor and there was a kind of groaning sigh among this big crowd of dignitaries that were present at this opening ceremony of this new plutonium building at Rocky Flats.

Well, that was a kind of symbol of what was going to happen, because almost—very, very quickly after they got that building into operation, they had some kind of accident that released plutonium and contaminated a huge part of the building and made it impossible for them to do what they had intended to do with that building. So the building never functioned as it was supposed to function. It was supposed to take the place of 776-777, I believe, and it was never able to assume that—to be given that new role. And it became primarily a storage facility and they did minor things in there but they were never able to do what they intended for it to do.

31:05 Well, after the FBI raid and the halt to production late in '89, the Department of Energy came up with a new plan. They wanted to go back into this building and spend I think a good bit more than they had spent building it in the first place, and bring it and correct the problems and get it back into operation and resume production at Rocky Flats. They called it the PRMP—Plutonium Recovery and Modification Project, I believe, is the name they were giving for the project of getting that new building—that building back into operation as they wanted it.

Well, Senator Wirth and David Skaggs, especially those two, especially Wirth in the Senate and Pat Schroeder, they opposed it. And because they were the powerful figures from in the Congress, from Colorado, connected closely with Rocky Flats, Rocky Flats being in the district of David Skaggs and in the state of Tim Wirth the Senator, they had enormous influence with their colleagues in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

And we were having demonstrations against restarting that facility. We were going to hearings and speaking against restarting that facility. When the vote was taken in the Congress, they did not provide the funding to restart that facility. And it was not very long after that that Admiral Watkins—it seemed to become really clear to Admiral Watkins and to President Bush that they were never going to get Rocky Flats back on line again.

And it was in his State of the Union address in January, 1992, that President Bush Senior [the first President Bush] had a sentence in that State of the Union address that a certain warhead that was to be used on the Trident submarines would not be manufactured any longer, we were going to stop manufacturing this. When he made that announcement, it was code language. It was understood immediately by the workers at Rocky Flats and by the activists outside Rocky Flats. We knew immediately that that meant that there'd be no more production of nuclear weapons at Rocky Flats.

It was a few weeks later that Admiral Watkins, still Secretary of Energy, announced that the mission of Rocky Flats was changing from production to cleanup. And that was the end of production at Rocky Flats.

34:24 It was a bitter, bitter moment for the workers. It was a moment of a kind of triumph for the activists who had done so much to work toward that moment. We at the same time tried even—we had a little party on the sidewalk out in front of the American Friends Service Committee in Denver in which we poured champagne to the end to production at Rocky Flats, but we also announced to the media that we were not opposed to the workers at Rocky Flats. We really wanted to see what we had advocated since the late '70s. We wanted to see conversion of Rocky Flats from doing the destructive activity that it had been doing to doing something socially positive, socially useful. And we wanted these very same workers to be able to make the transition and to have ongoing employment to do this. And we assumed that meanwhile, they were going to have the task of cleaning up Rocky Flats.

Unfortunately, I think that message that we tried to put out supporting the transition for the workers and the economic conversion idea was pretty much buried and lost, and relations between the workers and the activists was not good.

And there's kind of a history of that at Rocky Flats and I could talk about that some. Maybe that would be a topic to pick up on at another time. It is an issue, and it goes back—it has deep roots in that 1978 event when I learned about Rocky Flats. Because when that extended blockade of a year, about a year, when people were going to Rocky Flats off and on and blockading the railroad tracks, it had been a sort of gentlemen's agreement between the American Friends Service Committee and the workers at Rocky Flats and the Department of Energy and Rockwell that in April of 1978 they would have a legal demonstration, they would have a symbolic blockade on the tracks at Rocky Flats, people would be out there overnight, and then the next day they would leave without being arrested. They just—they simply wanted to show that they had large numbers; that they could do a real blockade but they weren't going to do a real blockade.

Well, some of the activists decided not to leave the tracks. One of them was Daniel Ellsberg, the famous person who released the Pentagon Papers, who influenced a lot of others. [see OH 1137V A-B, interview with Daniel Ellsberg] One of them was a student from Boulder High School named Todd Buchanan. Todd was just a teenager. And when they did the non-violence training in preparation for that supposedly symbolic blockade, they were dividing up into affinity groups, small groups—people in these large demonstrations, the activists, divide up into small groups, and those little groups function together and make decisions and they send representatives from

the many groups to what they call a Spokescouncil to make decisions for the whole group, but it's a very democratic process—but anyway, in creating affinity groups that day when they had the training, Todd Buchanan—they were ready to divide up into groups and Todd said, he stood up—high school boy—he stood up and he said, “Anyone that would like to join me in the Monday morning breakfast club we'll be right over here in this corner.”

Well, he was declaring to everybody in that way that he was not going to leave the tracks on Sunday, as they had planned. He was going to stay there. And lo and behold, I was told that Daniel Ellsberg got up and went over and sat down next to Todd Buchanan.

39:10 There are a lot of stories that get told, but [when] the people decided to stay on the tracks, it became a very, very divisive issue among the activists that had done so much to draw people from all over the country for this day at Rocky Flats in April, 1978. They were very, very unhappy with the fact that people decided to stay on the tracks in violation of the agreements they had worked out with the workers and so on. And the workers weren't especially—many of them weren't especially happy about demonstrators coming out there anyway. Some of them really felt betrayed by this, and it put a kind of bad taste between the workers and the activists.

(As you look back on that now, is that something that you regret?)

Something that—?

(Something that you regret in terms of—)

No, and I've actually talked to Pam Solo [see OH 1272V A-B, interview with Pam Solo], who was the director of the American Friends Service Committee Rocky Flats Project at the time. She was one of those people who was most unhappy on this occasion. She herself said eventually that she came to the conclusion that it was probably the best thing that happened because it really put Rocky Flats on the map. 1978 was a very, very crucial year for opposition to nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the United States and beyond the United States in other countries. Up to that point, the activities against nuclear weapons had been on a very, very small scale, and suddenly it just blossomed into a huge activity that started, really started in a big way at Rocky Flats with that spring 1978 action and spread from there to other facilities around the country. It continues.

(Maybe this would be a good place to stop at least for now?)

Yeah.

(OK?)

OK. As you can see I can go on and on!

41:45 [End of Tape B. End of interview.]