

Nevada Desert Expressions



A Zine About Antinuclear Activism
and
Our Experiences on the Sacred Peace Walk 2020

A Message from Brittney B. (NDE Events Coordinator)

I want to thank everyone that submitted art, pictures and writings to make this project possible. Putting together this zine was an act of love. It was an act of resistance, amid the chaos that was 2020. I hope that as you look through it, it serves as a reminder that we are all in this together. We are a community doing all that we can, for a more peaceful world.



Peacewalkers marching along the highway.

Community is Possible

By Laura Marie

On my first Sacred Peace Walk, I got a taste of healthy community. I was shy, super quiet, awkward, crazy, not in good shape for the amount of walking I was attempting to do, not easy to understand.

I was loved just the same--valued and cared for. I felt accepted and supported by a community for the first time in my life. People I'd met two days before were treating me like I mattered, and they wouldn't let me slip through the cracks.

The first day of the walk, we walk through Las Vegas. I was disturbed and crying--upset about the city's excess and poverty, the contrast between the huge casinos with blinking lights and noise, luring gamblers and taking their money, vs the homeless people everywhere on the sidewalks, suffering in every way, human beings treated like trash.

I saw advertisement fliers on the ground depicting half-naked call girls, trampled by tourists, and saw women being disrespected. human women, Mother Earth, humanity--everyone, really. All that mattered was making a buck.

After that day's walk, an interfaith minister saw I was suffering and took me to her room. She talked with me, prayed with me, and helped me feel more grounded and safe. I'd felt overly exposed, on the city walk. Her love helped me feel capable of continuing.

That week definitely had some difficult times, but people I barely knew were there for me.

I learned that another world is possible. The community I experienced was real. Excited at learning what's possible, I want to help make that supportive world more widespread, and help other people have what I have.

Some people say feeding the hungry is stupid--they'll just be hungry again in a few hours, right? but when I hand someone bread, I'm loving them, which is valuable beyond anything.



Image of the desert sky the morning of the walk.



Dale's van at a stop, bathing in the desert beauty.

being by Laura-Marie

a human, not a target. a human, not
bugsplat. a human, not a prisoner. a
human, not a customer. a human, not a
problem. a human, not a mistake. a
human, not an incidental casualty. a
human, not a failure. a human, not a
patient. a human, not a victim. a human,
not a soldier. a human, not a killer. a
human, not a war monger. a human, not a
button pusher. a human, not a real life
video game player. a human, not a
commander. a human, not a bomber. a
human, not a tool.

Artwork by Brother Mark



inside out justice
using teachings of Jesus
makes our world better

A-bomb a Nation?



Abombination!

Artwork By Gar Smith



Environmentalists Against War
PO Box 27, Berkeley, CA 94701

“I created the attached poster for Hiroshima Day after realizing that the images we see of the atomic bombing of that city typically show the rubble of flattened buildings but rarely show the human victims.”



Artwork by Brother Mark



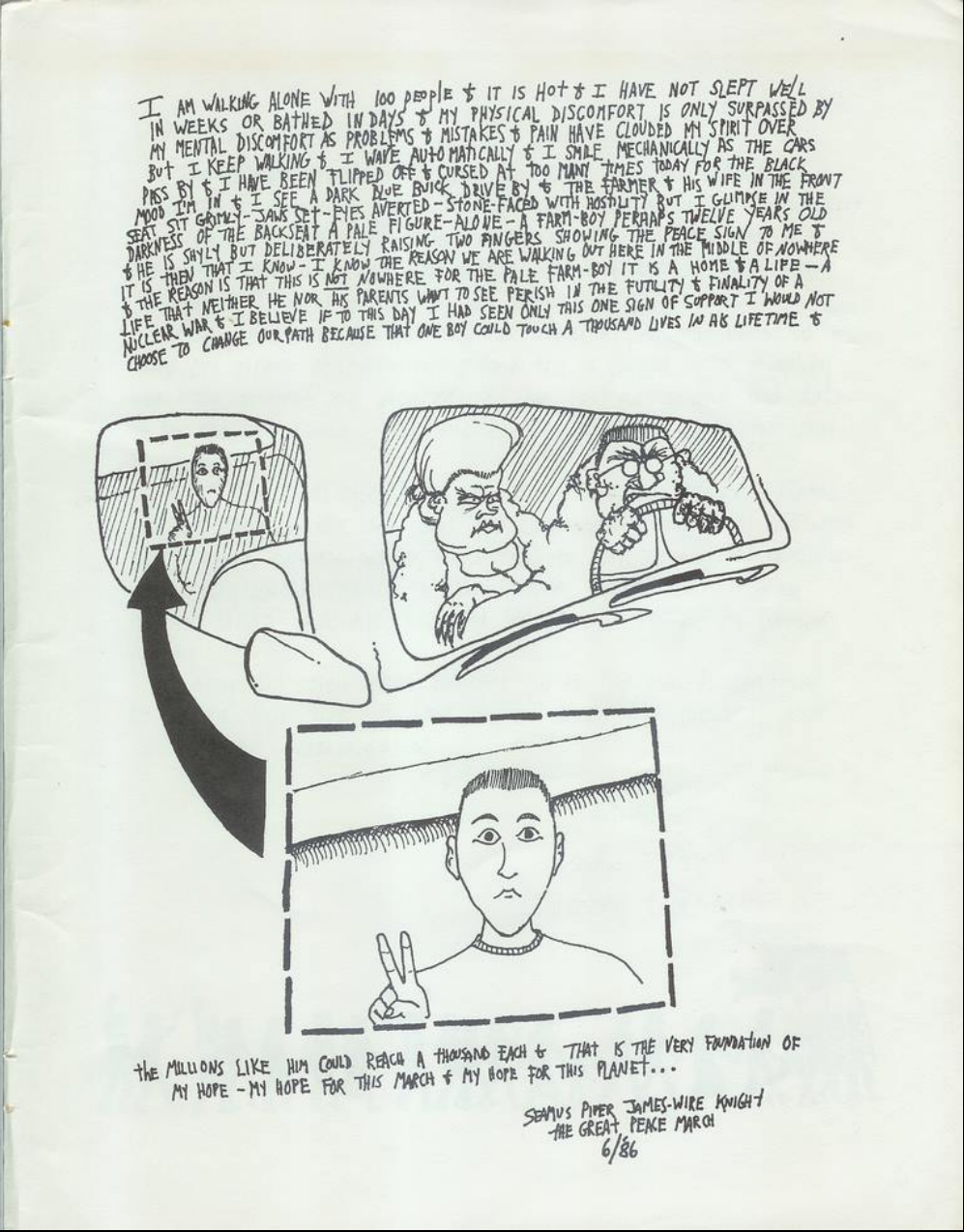
where did we go wrong
corruption in Washington
hope in nonviolence

Artwork by Laura Marie



Artwork by Karen Johannah Pettit





I am James Séamus Knight and I have been on the Sacred Peace Walk five times, making the documentary Holy Week on the walk in 2016.

Sadly I am unable to attend this walk this year so I thought I'd submit an artwork of mine from 1986 when I walked across the country, Los Angeles to Washington DC, on the Great Peace March for Global Nuclear Disarmament with 500+ other activists.

I call the work "Hope in America".

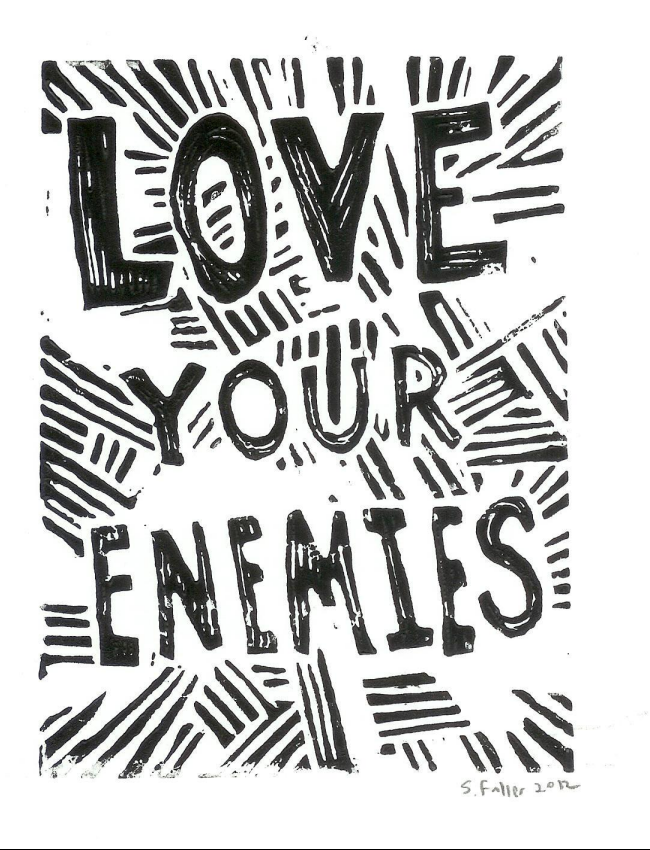
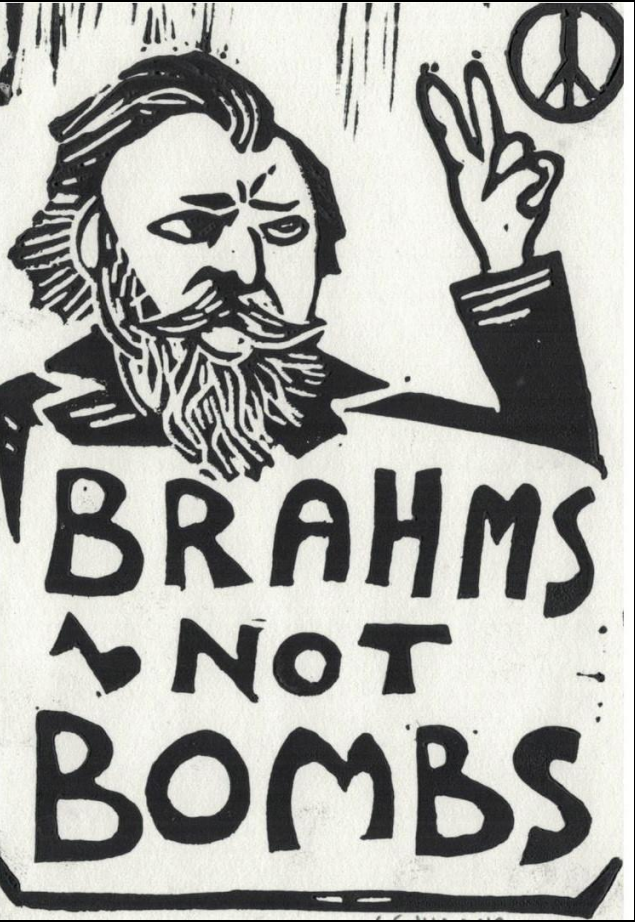
My films can be seen at:
www.youtube.com/caneyhead



Artwork by Karen Johannah Pettit



Artwork by Sarah Fuller



Dear Nevada Desert Experience Staff,

Thank you for the invitation to send artwork for your consideration for the virtual Peace Walk zine. Attached is a poem I wrote on this topic, about a tragic drone strike in Yemen that killed a 13 year old boy, which was documented by the Guardian newspaper.

Also attached are a couple of photos from the LA Times from Friday, February 6, 1987 when I first went to the Nevada Test Site to protest continued nuclear testing. As you can see it was a joyous event and thrilling to meet so many people who shared the faith that there is a better and more peaceful way for the world to live. More than 2,000 people attended and 437 were arrested for non-violent civil disobedience.

I was only 17 at the time and the experienced organizers I met there had a profound effect on my activism for the next 30 years. (I'm the woman in the center left with a big toothy smile applauding next to my friend in the white sweater with dark stripes across the middle. She is now an excellent investigative reporter for Mother Jones.)

Thank you for coordinating this project and for doing the important work you do.

Sincerely,

Rachel White

Salt Lake City, Utah

<https://twitter.com/rachelwx13>



“A Tribute To Our Paiute Lands”
by Brittney Ballesteros



@soulsessionsx



“Everything is Connected”
by Brittney Ballesteros

As I do this work and learn more about nuclear activism, I see how abolishing nuclear weapons is instrumental in fostering radical mental health for everyone. Most of the time, when we talk about mental health, we tend to only focus on the individual, seeing the issue as biology. A brain problem. A possible imbalance of chemicals. A cocktail of pills to give some relief, with lots of side effects. I honor those who chose what is best for them, prescription or not.

Focusing only on biology leaves out the larger picture: environment and society. The places we live, where we have come from, our history, surviving in our capitalistic society.

If someone has lived through nuclear terrorism, does it do them a justice to write off their trauma as a simple fact of biology? I think not. I remember learning about Hiroshima in high school. That picture of the little girl running in the streets crying, running away from the explosion has stuck in my mind. Learning about the radiation that not only affected those who survived, but also the babies, who were born with malformations from the radiation that their mothers carried. That trauma affected everyone, in many ways.

Getting rid of nuclear weapons seems to be the only option that makes sense. We can't keep allowing those in power to expose people to this kind of trauma.

Transformation in the Desert

By Wendy Rogan

We have walked sixty miles from Las Vegas with the goal of this last step, over the single white painted line on the road marking the boundary of the Nevada National Security Site, the US nuclear testing site. When we cross this line, we will become unauthorized persons, trespassers, subject to arrest. A security risk at a security site. But we have come to call attention to the real security risk here—the horrific weapons that pose an existential threat to all of us. We see this border as illegitimate, the land stolen from indigenous Western Shoshone people. So we will blur this boundary with our bodies, make the illegitimate the illegible, if just for a moment in time. Maybe we'll wear off some white paint in the process, and maybe we'll wear down the system, too, just a little.

It is Good Friday, April 19, 2019, and with over fifty of us gathered here, we are the largest group of people to protest at the NNSS for the last two decades. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, thousands gathered at a place we call Peace Camp, directly opposite Hwy. 95 from the test site. During spring and fall events, hundreds participated in nonviolent civil resistance by crossing the boundary, a symbolic act of reclaiming the land. This ritual grew out of earlier back country actions involving small groups of dedicated activists who deliberately hiked to the testing grounds to try to disrupt nuclear tests by announcing their presence on the site moments before the bombs were scheduled to be detonated.

In 1992, the US stopped underground explosive nuclear tests, but continued to run “sub-critical” tests that allow the development of new weapons designs aided by computer models. The mass demonstrations at the test site during this time are now regarded as influential in bringing a halt to full-scale nuclear tests. Yet, the US nuclear arsenal continues to expand, with a \$1.3 trillion “modernization” underway, and dangerous new weapons designs in the works.

We have much work to do to re-build the momentum we once had, but there is reason for renewed hope. The movement reached a milestone in 2017 when the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was signed by 122 nations. The sponsoring group, the International Coalition for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, ICAN, received the Nobel Peace Prize the following year. The treaty is significant because it makes the development and use of nuclear weapons illegal under International Law, classifying these weapons in the same category as chemical and biological weapons, and applying pressure on the US and the eight other nuclear-armed nations to dismantle their arsenals. The treaty is now in the ratification phase, with just three more nations needed before entering into force.

After a morning of ceremony and prayer, we gather now at the test site boundary for our final ritual. Johnnie Bobb, Western Shoshone spiritual leader, speaks of the harm that radiation has done to the water, plants, and animals, and reminds us that the land was taken from the indigenous people who have lived here for centuries. John from Veterans for Peace, who brings with him a written indictment, admonishing the war crimes committed at this site. He says that as a veteran, it is duty to protest the atrocities of war.

Then all at once, as if at some unheard signal, we begin crossing. I walk over the line together with my friend, Seamus. Above the drumming and chanting, I hear a shout of “thank you!” from the folks at the line, and I look back over my shoulder and wave. I am a little giddy, and I do not notice that a deputy is motioning for me to walk over to the women’s pen. The deputies do not bother to handcuff us with zip ties anymore. We all know the steps to this dance, but this year, for the first time in two decades, the arrest policy has changed. Now, instead of a simple written warning, those with previous arrests here will be given official citations and court dates. Anyone who has received a citation previously, or who does not present an ID, will be booked into custody at the Beatty Jail, some 60 miles to the north.

In the women’s pen, there are eleven of us all together. We are all ages. We have come from near and far, citizens of Las Vegas, and Iowa, and the world. We are Catholic and pagan, Jewish and atheist. Some of us are here for the first time, while others have protested here for decades.

In 2016, inspired by the growing energy I saw in the movement, I came to Nevada to join the Sacred Peace Walk, the annual 60-mile pilgrimage from Las Vegas to the test site organized by Nevada Desert Experience during Holy Week each year. I wanted to reconnect with a community I had once been a part of when I lived in Las Vegas and worked to organize these demonstrations here in 1992-92. I had been active after this time, on and off, in other organizations and movements, but when I came back to Nevada, it felt like a kind of homecoming, like finding out I had family members I never knew before, who had somehow been waiting for me all this time. I returned the following year and have participated in a portion of each year’s walk since.

The women’s pen is exactly how I remembered it. A white plywood wall separates the men’s and women’s sides, while a chain-link fence surrounds the remaining three sides, providing us with a mostly unobstructed view of the desert landscape and the narrow road stretching to Mercury, an actual town populated by day with hundreds of test site workers. A white porta-potty is stationed inside the pen, but there is no water dispenser this time, like it was when hundreds were gathered inside these barriers. Women who were here before us formed a peace sign from stones in the center of the space.

We can talk with the men through the plywood, but we cannot see each other. We ask how many there are. Thirteen, we are told.

The deputies want to make sure that everyone is safely corralled before they start processing us, so now we wait. Linda takes refuge in the shade along the plywood wall. Jade walks along the perimeter of the fence, pouring water upon the ground at intervals, a prayer to heal the land that Johnnie Bobb has taught us. A couple of women sit down to meditate or perhaps to pray.

Tami engages the two deputies who stand outside the chain-link fence in conversation. She asks them why they want to work here. Her tone is open and nonthreatening. The older deputy says that there are bad people in the world who want to do us harm, and these weapons will keep us safe. Tami replies that these weapons make us less safe, their very production harms all of us by contaminating the Earth with radioactive waste that will be here for centuries to come.

“I have friends and family all over the world,” she says. “I want them to be safe, too, but no one is safe as long as we have nuclear weapons.”

In crossing the boundary of the NNSS this year, it is impossible not to think of the artificial boundaries that we create to define the us/them binary. Eighteen years of post 9-11 US wars have created instability throughout the world, resulting in a refugee crisis of unprecedented scale. As people have sought asylum here, the US response has been to further separate these “others” by containing people in detention centers that serve as concentration camps, separating children from parents, in what has become an appalling human rights crisis.

For us, borders and boundaries that divide people into “us” and “them” are an illusion. We know that what we do anywhere on earth affects people globally. There is an old slogan in the nuclear abolition movement, “we are all downwinders”, meaning that nuclear radiation eventually affects us all, by contaminating the water, soil, and the air we breathe. Eventually radiation moves even farther downstream, damaging our very DNA, a legacy of harm for future generations.

Nature’s boundaries, in contrast, are constantly changing, challenging us to define where one thing starts and another ends. Occasionally, these changes are rapid and dramatic, as with the calving of glaciers. More often, natural boundaries are shifted in subtle ways, over longer periods of time, more like the way the ocean shapes a shoreline. In the desert, the boundary between land and sky often appears as a shimmering distortion, a mirage, a reminder that borders are illusory.

It can be easy to think of those who stand on the opposite side of the fence as others, too. So we reach out, dialog, and engage folks as much as we can. You can never know how close someone is to coming over to your “side” until you talk with them, and you might be the one who tips the scale.

Several of the women have sat down around the stone peace sign now. Someone has a lighter, and we make a small ceremonial fire out of sage in the center of the peace sign. We take turns tossing sage onto the fire and offering prayers. We sing:

Oh, Great Spirit

Earth, sun, sky, and sea

You are within

And all around me

We clap as we chant, over and over again, speeding up, laughing joyously.

Soon the deputies are ready to process us. Two elder women are cited and released first, and then it is my turn. I have brought my ID with me and will be released with just a written warning this time.

As I wait, I notice a tiny green caterpillar crawling near my feet, and reach down to allow her to crawl onto my hand. Days earlier, we had witnessed shimmering waves of butterflies crossing the desert highway, part of a mass migration that spring. I wonder if this caterpillar will soon undertake the same journey. Like this little creature, the potential for transformation lies within all of us, just awaiting the right conditions. As peace activists, we journey to the desert to help create the conditions for change on a larger scale. We work to bring about a migration to a way of thinking that understands how we are connected to the earth and to each other, a consciousness that goes beyond borders and boundaries. It is a sacred purpose.

Wendy Rogan is a Councilor with Nevada Desert Experience



**“I don’t condone atomic drones”
by Vezun**



@vezunvezun

**“Overcoming Evil”
by Karen Johannah Pettit**



Heal These Global Wounds

May the air I breathe,
Give me the strength to do,
The work of the one,
Great Spirit who,
Animates all the universe,
From the smallest creature to the furthest star,
Heal, heal
Heal these wounds
Heal these global wounds

May the fire I burn,
Give me the strength to do,
The work of the one,
Great Spirit who,
Animates all the universe,
From the smallest creature to the furthest star,
Heal, heal
Heal these wounds
Heal these global wounds

May the water I drink,
Give me the strength to do,
The work of the one,
Great Spirit who,
Animates all the universe,
From the smallest creature to the furthest star,
Heal, heal
Heal these wounds
Heal these global wounds

May the earth I walk,
Give me the strength to do,
The work of the one,
Great Spirit who,
Animates all the universe,
From the smallest creature to the furthest star,
Heal, heal
Heal these wounds
Heal these global wounds.