Jim Douglas and Nonviolent Resistance to War and Nuclear Weapons

Articles about, and interviews with, peace activist Jim Douglass
by Terry Messman

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Life at Ground Zero of the Nuclear Arms Race
By Terry Messman -- June 8, 2015 --
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Jim and Shelley Douglass moved right next door to the Trident submarine base — Ground Zero of the nuclear arms race — and organized a boat blockade that led to an epic confrontation with the Navy and Coast Guard on the waters of Puget Sound.

Sue Ablao and Anne Hall of the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Photo courtesy of Ground Zero Center

Jim and Shelley Douglass helped to organize one of the nation's most significant and multifaceted campaigns of nonviolent resistance when they uprooted their lives, left their home behind, and literally moved right next door to Ground Zero of the nuclear arms race, in a home adjacent to the Bangor Naval Submarine Base in Kitsap County, Washington.

Their new next-door neighbors were a fleet of Trident submarines and an unimaginably destructive stockpile of Trident missiles in weapons bunkers.

In an interview, Jim Douglass starkly described the genocidal power of this weapons system. "A single Trident submarine could destroy an entire country. A fleet of Tridents could destroy the world."

Lockheed missile designer Robert Aldridge had visited the Douglasses at their home in Hedley, British Columbia, to warn them that Trident missiles were first-strike nuclear weapons due to their pinpoint accuracy, short flight time and cataclysmic firepower, and would be based across the border on Puget Sound near Seattle.

In response, Jim and Shelley Douglass co-founded Pacific Life Community (PLC) with other Canadian and American peace activists in January 1975 to begin the Trident campaign.

In November 1977, PLC members, including Jim and Shelley, purchased 3.8 acres of land with a little house next to the Bangor naval base, giving Trident resisters a "piece of the rock," as a local Kitsap County resident put it. They called their new organizing site "Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action."

In September 1978, Jim and Shelley Douglass moved to Kitsap County to work full time at Ground Zero. Douglass explained that the couple had found that they could not offer genuine resistance to the Trident submarine by coming in as outsiders to organize protests, so they became Kitsap County residents. Now neighbors as well as Trident resisters, they began reaching out to the naval employees working at the Trident base.

The Ground Zero Center sat on a piece of land that shared 330 feet of fence with the Bangor naval base. On one side of that fence, the U.S. Navy was equipping a fleet of Trident submarines with enough firepower to incinerate millions of civilians in a radioactive firestorm and destroy every major city in every country in the world. On the other side of the fence, Ground Zero began building a nonviolent movement based on the teachings of Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi.

On one side, U.S. marines with shoot-to-kill orders guarded nuclear warheads in storage bunkers. On the other side, activists held nonviolence trainings and prepared to go to jail for obstructing the arms race.

Ground Zero members gave leaflets to thousands of workers entering the Trident base every week for several years.

Activists by the hundreds were arrested for climbing the fences surrounding the naval base, walking inland to pray for peace at high-security nuclear weapons bunkers, blocking trains carrying hydrogen bombs into the base, and sailing their small boats in a peace blockade of the massive Trident submarine protected by one of the world's largest naval forces.

Ground Zero's campaigns attempted to encompass all the dimensions of Gandhi's vision of nonviolence, from militant confrontation with injustice, to reverence for the lives of people on all sides in the conflict, to education and dialogue.

At times, that made their actions seem almost like a contradiction in terms. For even as Ground Zero organized some of the most militant acts of anti-nuclear resistance in the nation, it also strongly embraced the ethical values of nonviolence taught by Gandhi, King and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

The same activists that were pushing nonviolence to its outer limits by staging increasingly radical confrontations with the U.S. military, were also highly committed to recognizing the humanity of the naval base workers, both civilian and military. They spent hundreds of hours trying to create a dialogue with Trident base personnel and refused to see them as the enemies of peace.

Trident protesters on a freeway overpass: "Create A Peaceful World For All Children. Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Scrap Trident." Photo courtesy Ground Zero Center

TRIDENT BASE'S MILITARY CHAPLAIN RESIGNS

Ground Zero's adherence to nonviolence and its sincere and friendly attempts to communicate with base workers influenced many naval base employees to resign for reasons of conscience. This led to the highly visible resignation of the chaplain of the Trident base, Father Dave Becker, who decided he could no longer attempt to be "the chaplain of the Auschwitz of Puget Sound."

The Ground Zero Center also inspired activists in hundreds of communities around the nation to hold vigils on railroad tracks to block the White Train shipments of nuclear warheads from the Pantex hydrogen bomb assembly plant in Amarillo, Texas, to the Bangor base.

One of Ground Zero's most far-reaching successes was the enormous impact it had on the nation's faith communities. Countless bishops, ministers, priests, rabbis and nuns were directly inspired by Ground Zero's nonviolent campaigns to become personally involved in speaking out against the nuclear arms race.

Jim Douglass was an influential theologian and former professor of religion at Notre Dame and the University of Hawaii, and the author of such renowned books of peace theology as The Nonviolent Cross and Resistance and Contemplation. Shelley Douglass also was a theologian and an eloquent writer on nonviolence, and several other members of Ground Zero were deeply involved in Protestant and Catholic churches and Buddhist orders.

Ground Zero activists had intensively studied the movement-building strategies and ethical values of Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns and the U.S. civil rights movement, and their commitment to principled nonviolent actions enabled them to have a profound impact on faith communities.

Undoubtedly, the most inspiring religious leader who worked closely with Ground Zero was Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, one of the most courageous and radical opponents of nuclear weapons. The archbishop was deeply supportive of Ground Zero's nonviolent protests, and, in turn, Hunthausen greatly inspired Ground Zero and the peace movement as a whole when he became one of the nation's most outspoken voices for peace and disarmament.

Hunthausen electrified the conscience of a nation when he denounced the Trident submarine as the "Auschwitz of Puget Sound" and called for massive civil disobedience and tax resistance to what he described as "nuclear murder and suicide."

His call to rebellion against the arms race, "Faith and Disarmament," was given on June 12, 1981, to the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Lutheran Church.

With the fiery urgency of a prophet, Hunthausen told the Lutheran clergy, "First-strike nuclear weapons are immoral and criminal. They benefit only arms corporations and the insane dreams of those who wish to 'win' a nuclear holocaust."

AN OCEANGOING HOLOCAUST

In the immediate aftermath of the archbishop's uncompromising call to resistance, many Catholic bishops, Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis were moved to speak out against nuclear weapons.

And the peace movement found new hope. At last, someone with the power to make his voice heard had the courage to call the Trident nuclear submarine what it truly was: an oceangoing Holocaust, an underwater death camp loaded with weapons of mass incineration that could ignite a firestorm and slaughter millions.

Most importantly, Hunthausen didn't merely call for a lukewarm set of reforms. He called for immediate nuclear disarmament and massive civil disobedience because of his conviction that nuclear weapons are criminal and immoral.

During the first years of the Reagan era, when many progressive voices were muzzled or ignored, Hunthausen called for the outright abolition of nuclear weapons.

The archbishop said, "The nuclear arms race can be stopped. Nuclear weapons can be abolished. That I believe with all my heart and faith, my sisters and brothers!"

What in the world could have ever led an American archbishop to denounce a U.S. weapons system as the Auschwitz of Puget Sound? If we are to understand Archbishop Hunthausen's comparison of Trident to Auschwitz, we must retrace an amazing series of historic events that began in 1945, when Nazi Germany's leaders were put on trial for crimes against humanity in the town of Nuremberg, Germany, the symbolic birthplace of the Nazi Party.

NUREMBERG WAR CRIMES TRIALS

During the Nuremberg trials, new cause for hope began to emerge from the destructive fires of war, and crucial principles of international law began to arise out of the ashes of Nazi concentration camps.

In the autumn of 1945, a few weeks after the end of World War II, Allied forces held a series of trials for political, economic and military leaders of Nazi Germany. In the first trial, 23 top officials of the Third Reich were charged by the International Military Tribunal with war crimes for their roles in planning unprovoked wars of aggression, and operating death camps where millions of civilians were systematically exterminated.

Twelve subsequent Nuremberg Military Tribunals were held from December 1946 to April 1949, where an additional 185 Nazi defendants were prosecuted, including doctors accused of forced euthanasia, judges who implemented racial purity laws, officials in charge of "racial cleansing and resettlement," directors of the Krupp Group who manufactured armaments with a brutal system of slave labor, and directors of the company that made Zyklon B, the poisonous cyanide gas used to murder countless civilians in concentration camps.

The Nuremberg Principles that resulted from these trials defined crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. They are now foundational principles of international law, and have served as models for The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Genocide Convention and the Geneva Convention.

Nazi officials had been put on trial by the victorious Allied forces, and yet international law is just that — an international set of principles that applies to all nations, not just to nations that lose a war.

WAR CRIMES IN VIETNAM

Only 25 years after the Nuremberg trials were held, the U.S. government itself was being accused of war crimes in Vietnam when hundreds of thousands of defenseless civilians were deliberately massacred in saturation bombing campaigns, and targeted with napalm, Agent Orange, and anti-personnel weapons.

One particular protest against war crimes in Vietnam is the next step in this historic chain of events that connects the Nuremberg trials with the Trident submarine in the waters of Puget Sound.

In 1972, Jim Douglass, then a professor of religion at the University of Hawaii, committed civil disobedience based on the Nuremberg Principles by pouring his own blood on top-secret electronic warfare documents. Electronic warfare and anti-personnel bombs in Vietnam indiscriminately slaughtered children and civilians and thus constituted a war crime.

In a stunning historical twist, two of the U.S. attorneys who prosecuted Nazis for war crimes during the original Nuremberg trials, traveled to Hawaii to defend Douglass and his co-defendants, Jim Albertini and Chuck Giuli, after they were arrested and charged with destroying files on electronic warfare at Hickam Air Force Base.

Mary Kaufman and Benjamin Ferencz were prosecuting attorneys for the United States at the Nuremberg trial, and now acted as defense attorneys for the Hickam Three, citing international law in arguing that they were acting in obedience to the Nuremberg Principles by

pouring blood on top-secret files in order to bring war crimes to the attention of the American public.

Nuremberg attorney Mary Kaufman said the trial of the Hickam Three had "the most startling testimony ever given in a U.S. courtroom on the war in Vietnam."

A former Air Force sergeant testified that while he was stationed at Hickam Air Base in Hawaii, he had witnessed "the deliberate targeting of a Laotian hospital for obliteration bombing, as well as the targeting of numerous other civilian objectives."

The USS Ohio (shown above) was the first in a fleet of Trident submarines. A single Trident sub has the explosive power of several thousand Hiroshima bombs and could destroy every city in an entire nation.

WAR CRIMES AT LOCKHEED

Two key persons who attended this trial were Lockheed missile designer Robert Aldridge and his wife, Janet Aldridge. When Robert Aldridge heard the Nuremberg attorneys describe the nature of war crimes, he was stunned to recognize that his own life's work in designing first-strike Trident nuclear missiles also constituted a war crime, and in the aftermath of that realization, he decided to resign from Lockheed Missiles and Space Corporation for reasons of conscience.

It is striking how this single act of conscience by one person, supported by his family, would affect the course of the anti-nuclear movement in the United States.

After the trial, Aldridge visited Jim and Shelley Douglass and warned them that the Pentagon was developing a submarine that would be the most lethal weapons system of all time. Trident's accuracy, short flight time, and explosive power made it a first-strike weapon — and therefore a war crime.

In response to Aldridge's act of conscience, Jim and Shelley with other Canadian and American activists co-founded the Pacific Life Community, then launched the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action. In that way, the Nuremberg trials had set off a chain reaction of conscience that reached all the way to Puget Sound — the home port of the Trident submarine.

Then, this chain reaction continued onward, as the anti-nuclear resistance carried out by Ground Zero influenced Archbishop Hunthausen to publicly declare his support for these acts of civil disobedience — a bold and highly controversial step for a high church official to take, especially since the archbishop's pastoral responsibilities included thousands of employees at the Trident base.

Finally, the chain reaction of conscience that began with the Nuremberg trials in 1945 came full circle when the Seattle archbishop declared that the Trident submarine was a crime against humanity comparable in magnitude to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

The next step in this historic drama was not long in coming. A year or so after Hunthausen condemned the Trident submarine, the archbishop was on a boat with other religious leaders in the waters of Puget Sound, a seafaring prayer vigil that was offered in support and solidarity for the nonviolent activists who had launched the Trident peace blockade.

The confrontation between the unarmed power of nonviolence and the Auschwitz of Puget Sound came to a head at the Trident peace blockade on August 12, 1982. Jim Douglass and the Ground Zero Center were instrumental in organizing this dramatic and risk-filled blockade because of their determination to offer their lives in nonviolent resistance to the USS Ohio, the first Trident submarine.

My then-wife Darla Rucker and I lived for two weeks on board a small sailboat, the "Lizard of Woz," with Jim Douglass, captain Ted Phillips and his wife Eve Phillips. Also on board the boat were Bruce Turner and Chris Codol from Spirit affinity group — the peace community we had formed as seminary students at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley — and several other highly dedicated peace activists. Every activist on board the Lizard of Woz and the Pacific Peacemaker had contemplated the serious risks to our physical safety and the likelihood of years in federal prison, and had chosen to accept these risks as the price of peace.

PRE-EMPTIVE ATTACK BY MASSIVE NAVAL FLEET

In the predawn hours of August 12, we received word that the USS Ohio was seen approaching the Hood Canal. The waters were suddenly swarming with a fleet of Coast Guard cutters that launched a pre-emptive attack on our tiny peace fleet. It was David vs. Goliath on the waters of Puget Sound.

The Trident submarine was truly a behemoth — four stories high and 560 feet long (the length of nearly two football fields) — and it was protected that day by a fleet of 99 heavily armed Coast Guard ships, a fleet larger than nearly every other navy in the world, as Seattle newspapers reported.

Our ragtag little peace flotilla had only two small sailboats and 20 tiny rowboats. Striking suddenly in the gray dawn, Coast Guard cutters rammed our sailboats, and then armed officers boarded the boats and pointed machine guns and M-16 rifles at our heads. From their ships, they trained high-intensity water cannons on us and shot our rowboats out of the water.

The Seattle newspapers called it "The Battle of Oak Bay," and published photographs of Coast Guard boats attacking our fleet with water cannons. The next day's Seattle Times pictured me in my wetsuit swimming in the cold waters of Puget Sound after the water-cannon assault had capsized my boat.

Ruth Nelson, age 78, had been the subject of a film documentary, "Mother of the Year," and she was arrested that day with her son Jon Nelson, a Lutheran minister. Our oldest peace blockader, Ruth Nelson stared down the Coast Guard's water cannons. She said, "Whether I was thrown into those cold waters, whether it would have meant my life, I had to put my life on the line."

In the days leading up to the boat blockade, we had trained with Greenpeace volunteers who warned us that if we were swept into the cold, turbulent waters of Puget Sound, we would be at risk of death. All 46 activists who agreed to take part in the blockade knew we were facing 10 years in prison — and serious risks to our lives.

In his article, "The Peace Blockade and the Rise of Nonviolent Civil Disobedience," Matt Dundas interviewed boat blockaders Kim Wahl and Renee Krisko about those risks. Their responses revealed the attitudes shared by the peace blockaders on the eve of the confrontation with the USS Ohio.

"WE THOUGHT WE'D DIE IN THE WATER"

"Despite threats of ten years in prison and a $10,000 fine, none of the protesters backed out." Wahl added, "I just knew in my heart that I had to do it." Looking back later, she asked her friend and fellow blockader Renee Krisko why they hadn't thought much about the potential repercussions. "Because we thought we'd die in the water," said Krisko.

No one lost their life that day, although our boats were rammed and bombarded with water cannons that sent us flying into the waters of Puget Sound. We were fished out of the water with long metal pikes, then arrested at gunpoint.

One reporter wrote that the arrests were so volatile, with so many heavy weapons trained on protesters, that "had a firecracker gone off at a critical moment, a massacre could have resulted."

When the Coast Guard boarded our sailboat, the Lizard of Woz, an armed officer aggressively aimed his gun at point-blank range at our captain, Ted Phillips. The officer cocked the gun and put it right against Ted's back; for a long period seething with tension, Ted's life was at risk. "The pistol in Ted's back was cocked, and the finger on its trigger shaking," Douglass recalled.

Many onlookers and news reporters expressed shock and astonishment at the massive and violent reaction of the Navy and Coast Guard to our small nonviolent blockade. In his book Lightning East to West, Douglass wrote that, from the perspective of the U.S. military, the stakes were very high in our confrontation with the Trident, so the Navy and Coast Guard were determined to take any steps necessary to overpower and suppress the peace blockade.

Douglass wrote: "The Coast Guard's preparation for a possible massacre was, I think, the result of a higher order to 'clear the protesters out of the way of the Ohio by any means necessary' — leaving the details of that, as at My Lai, to subordinate officers. Those surpised by the threatened use of such force should not have been. It was being deployed to protect history's most destructive weapons system from what the government perceived as the humiliation of being confronted and possibly stopped by 'a ragtag fleet,' an example it wished to discourage."

"THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE"

While awaiting the arrival of the USS Ohio, we spent two weeks living, eating and sleeping on board our sailboats. Those days and nights were packed with inspiring moments, but one of the most moving occurrences of all was the seaborne vigil held on a prayer boat a few days before the Trident arrived on August 12. That boat carried Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen and 12 bishops and church leaders from six denominations of the Church Council of Greater Seattle who had voyaged out on the waters of Puget Sound to express their solidarity with our peace blockade.

The chain reaction of conscience had traveled through the decades, person to person, from the courtroom in Nuremberg to the waters of Puget Sound.

As Jim Douglass explained in his interview with Street Spirit, Archbishop Hunthausen's uncompromising condemnation of nuclear weapons had sparked priest after priest, bishop after bishop, to condemn the arms race. That chain reaction eventually resulted in the entire body of the U.S. Catholic Bishops releasing the pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, "The Challenge of Peace," in 1983.

The 1983 pastoral letter was issued by the U.S. bishops at a time of global peril and dangerous instability in the nuclear arms race. The Reagan administration had scrapped arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union, and was presiding over a massive expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal fueled by one of the largest increases in military spending in U.S. history. At this same historic moment, the launching of a fleet of Trident first-strike nuclear submarines — the most lethal weapon system in history — had destabilized the precarious balance of a world already poised on the brink of nuclear oblivion.

Due to an ever-increasing level of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, the nation's nuclear arsenal was set on hair-trigger alert, and the Trident submarine suddenly made it possible to launch a devastating nuclear first strike. The highly respected Bulletin of Atomic Scientists had set the Doomsday Clock at 4 minutes to midnight as a measure of the imminent threat of global nuclear annihilation.

When Archbishop Hunthausen announced to the public that he would withhold half of his federal income tax in resistance to the preparations for nuclear war, he said, "I believe that the present issue is as serious as any the world has faced. The very existence of humanity is at stake."

The archbishop's stark words conveyed the terrible urgency felt by many people of conscience who had come to realize that the arms race threatened all human life everywhere. Hunthausen echoed Martin Luther King's warning that, in the nuclear era, the choice is between nonviolence and nonexistence.

At that very moment, during one of the darkest times in our history, the bishops released "The Challenge of Peace" and helped break through the public silence surrounding nuclear weapons in a major way. In doing so, they gave a great deal of hope to the movement for nuclear disarmament.

Douglass said, "Hunthausen played a huge role in the process that resulted in the bishops' statement. Hunthausen played a HUGE role. He would never say that, obviously."

Jim and Shelley Douglass played a HUGE role in the process that resulted in Archbishop Hunthausen's own acts of conscience and resistance. They would never say that, obviously.

EPILOGUE: REVERENCE FOR LIFE

Shortly before the USS Ohio was about to enter the Hood Canal, our Lizard of Woz sailboat docked at the shore for a moment, and a reporter breathlessly asked Jim Douglass how he expected the upcoming confrontation with the Trident submarine would turn out. It was a made-to-order media moment, a golden opportunity for a valiant reply that would echo in the nightly news broadcasts.

Instead, Jim was patient with the interviewer, but deliberately calm and self-effacing. He refused to buy into the drama of the moment, and seemed uninterested in making any grandiose statement. He simply said that he hoped that life would go on for everyone, and it was not in his power to see into the future. I learned a great deal from Jim's modest response at that moment.

Our presence on the water that day was meaningful, yet we were only one small part of the fabric of life. And reverence for life was the point of everything at that moment — far more important than offering dramatic sound bites for the media. We were simply taking a very modest stand for life, just like the trees and hills and wildflowers and the seals swimming in Puget Sound — nothing more, nothing less.

Blockading the 'White Train of Death'
By Terry Messman -- June 8, 2015 --
www.TheStreetSpirit.org

A reporter warned Jim Douglass that he had observed a train north of Seattle that looked like it was "carrying big-time weapons." The reporter added that the heavily armored, all-white train looked like "the train out of hell."

The White Train was loaded with nuclear warheads and had gun slits in the heavily armored cars. One newspaper called it the "Armageddon Express." Photo by Chris Guenzler

Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker, has been a lifelong source of inspiration for James and Shelley Douglass, both in their nonviolent resistance to war and nuclear weapons, and also in their solidarity with poor and homeless people.

Day devoted her life to the works of mercy for the poorest of the poor, and often quoted Fyodor Dostoevsky on the high cost of living out the ideal of love in the real world. "As Dostoevsky said: 'Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams.'"

The same warning might be given to those who try to live out the ideal of nonviolence in action, since love and nonviolence are essentially one and the same. (One of Mohandas Gandhi's descriptions of nonviolent resistance is "love-force.")

Although it may be heartening to read about nonviolence in the lives of Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Dorothy Day, it is a more "harsh and dreadful" proposition to engage in actual resistance to a nuclear submarine capable of destroying hundreds of cities, and protected by the most powerful government in the world.

Instead of nonviolence in dreams, one faces nonviolence in handcuffs and jail cells, nonviolence sailing in the path of massive submarines, nonviolence on the tracks blockading "the train out of hell."

By the early 1980s, Jim and Shelley Douglass and the members of Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action had created a highly visible campaign of resistance to the Trident nuclear submarine based at Bangor Naval Base near Seattle.

THE ARMAGEDDON EXPRESS

Then, in December 1981, the Trident campaign took on an entirely new dimension when a reporter warned Jim Douglass that he had observed a train north of Seattle that looked like it was "carrying big-time weapons."

The reporter added that the heavily armored, all-white train looked like "the train out of hell." It wouldn't be long before one newspaper would refer to it as the "Armageddon Express."

After being alerted by the reporter, Jim went outside the house where he and Shelley lived next to the railroad tracks leading into the Bangor base, and saw the White Train coming down the tracks. He noticed that several cars had turrets where Department of Energy (DOE) guards could put guns through slits to defend the train.

The White Train became a new focus for Ground Zero's resistance to nuclear weapons, as activists and train buffs discovered that the DOE utilized the train to ship nuclear weapons assembled at the Pantex plant in Amarillo, Texas, to the Bangor Naval Base and other military sites.

After mapping out the train routes, Ground Zero made connections with people in more than 250 towns along the hundreds of miles of railroad tracks traveled by the White Train. Residents in these towns began holding vigils on the tracks as the White Train roared by, and many were arrested on the tracks for blocking the trains and their deadly cargo.

WHITE NIGHT OF EXTINCTION

The White Train campaign became such a significant protest movement that it was featured in *People* magazine in May 1984. Not only was David Van Biema's report surprisingly meaningful and largely sympathetic to the anti-nuclear movement, the headline was stirring: "Radical Catholic Jim Douglass Fights a Grass-Roots War Against a Train Full of Nuclear Weapons."

For those who have never seen the gigantic Trident submarine, or witnessed the unsettling arrival of the White Train, Douglass gave as evocative a description of the nuclear train as I've ever heard.

"It was an awesome sight," he said. "You feel the reality of an inconceivable kind of destruction. Anybody who sees this train experiences the evil of nuclear arms, because it looks like what it is carrying — a white night."

The article in *People* captured the "harsh and dreadful" nature of love in confronting the nuclear arsenal. A White Train en route to a military base in Charleston, South Carolina, crossed the Mississippi River into Memphis, where 40 protesters watched the train, and eight more stood on the tracks to block it.
Biema reported: "As the train crossed the bridge, its whistle shrieked and its brakes screeched. Yards away, it seemed unable to stop. Seven of the demonstrators backed off, but Sister Christine Dobrowolski stood firm. Just 10 feet away, the train squealed to a halt. The group returned to the tracks to pray, and six were later arrested for criminal trespass."

Sister Christine nearly gave her life in this vigil for peace. Love on the tracks was more costly than love in dreams.

Three years later, on Sept. 1, 1987, Brian Willson, a Vietnam veteran and antiwar protester, sat on the tracks at the Concord Naval Weapons Station in an effort to block trains carrying bombs and nuclear warheads.

A munitions train roared down the tracks, and instead of slowing down at the sight of nonviolent protesters, gathered speed and ran over Willson, severing his legs, fracturing his skull and spilling his blood on the tracks.

Willson recovered from this near-fatal collision and has continued to live out the ideals of nonviolence. In an interview, Douglass said that Willson showed great courage and added, "Brian's pilgrimage is one of profound nonviolence. He continues on that journey today."

The tracks campaign continued into the late 1980s. Then, activists discovered a secret memo stating that the Department of Energy could no longer ship nuclear weapons on the White Train.

The reason given in the DOE memo was: "IN VIEW OF THE GROWING ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, WITH ITS APPARENT FOCUS ON THE WHITE DEATH TRAIN."

The power of nonviolence had not stopped the nuclear arms race, but it had stopped the White Train in its tracks.

PROPHETIC CALL TO RESISTANCE

When I was a journalism student in the late 1970s, my friends and I committed several acts of civil disobedience at the Rocky Flats plutonium trigger plant in Colorado and at Malmstrom Air Force Base, a command-and-control center for Minuteman missiles in Montana.

At that time, we read articles in peace journals and *CoEvolution Quarterly*that quoted Jim Douglass saying that movement activists needed to greatly deepen their acts of resistance in order to abolish nuclear weapons for the sake of humanity.

It was exactly the kind of prophetic call to action we had been waiting to hear, so when Ground Zero announced a large protest against the Trident submarine in the fall of 1979, my friends Karl Zanzig, David Armour and I answered the call.

At sunset on October 28, 1979, Karl, David and I climbed the fence, entered the Bangor naval base and walked inland to the place where nuclear warheads were stored in bunkers and guarded by Marines with shoot-to-kill orders. Just as we neared the bunkers, Marines drove up, pointed their rifles at us and arrested us.

I'll never forget what happened next. As we were handcuffed and led away, three deer suddenly emerged from the trees and watched us as we were put in vehicles.

Three protesters were going to jail, but those three deer were free, and their freedom felt like nature's consolation to us, or its solidarity. I realize that must sound sentimental, but all three of us felt that we had been blessed by the forests and the wild creatures who were threatened by those weapons no less than the people living in Kitsap County.

Peace activists on board the Lizard of Woz sailboat prepare to blockade the Trident submarine in Puget Sound. Darla Rucker sits at the rear in the far left. Terry Messman and Bruce Turner sit on the deck in the left foreground. Jim Douglass stands at far right.

After being sentenced, Karl Zanzig and I spent several months in Boron federal prison with Jim Douglass. Karl went on to organize the "Silence One Silo" campaign and was arrested for sitting on the concrete lid of a nuclear missile silo in Montana.

A year after my release from prison in July 1981, Ground Zero put out a call for a boat blockade of the Trident submarine in the summer of 1982. I was attending seminary in Berkeley and my first wife, Darla Rucker, was a director of Livermore Action Group. We traveled to Ground Zero for the blockade and boarded a sailboat, the Lizard of Woz, with Jim Douglass and our fellow Spirit affinity group member Bruce Turner.

With 46 other Trident protesters, we faced years in prison and went through a heavy pre-emptive attack from Coast Guard ships on August 12, 1982.

I told the story of the boat blockade in the June 2015 issue of *Street Spirit*. What still needs to be said is the high degree of trust and respect Darla and I had for Jim and Shelley Douglass in order to risk our lives in this way. The risks that people faced while climbing fences into the Bangor base, sailing to block a nuclear submarine, and sitting on tracks to stop the White Train, reveal the respect that were felt by many activists for the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action.

A THEOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AND PEACE

Yet, as inspiring as these actions were, the theology I found in Douglass's first three books left an even deeper mark. In recent months, as I've been re-reading *The Nonviolent Cross, Resistance and Contemplation*, and *Lightning East to West*, I've rediscovered how greatly these books influenced my spiritual and political values, and what a strong foundation for activism they have given.

The Nonviolent Cross, written in 1968, is subtitled "A Theology of Revolution and Peace." Douglass presents a profound response to the anguish of the victims of the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the defenseless civilians exterminated by the Third Reich in the Auschwitz death camp and by the Allies in the firebombing of Dresden, and also reflects on the terrible suffering inflicted on the people of Vietnam.

The Nonviolent Cross is one of the most significant theological works on the great issues of war and peace, nuclear disarmament, resistance and revolution ever written. It offers a farsighted analysis of the ethical values underlying the just war tradition, the Christian perspective on peacemaking and Gandhian nonviolence.

But it is more than simply a fine work of theology. It is also a passionate call to resistance and revolution.

The Nonviolent Cross is the work of a Catholic theologian who had taught religion at Notre Dame, and worked closely with priests and archbishops, yet it was amazingly inclusive, open-minded and respectful of people from diverse faiths.

Douglass declared that Gandhi, a Hindu, was the greatest follower of Jesus in history, even though he obviously was not a Christian. He wrote with great admiration for the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in a Nazi death camp for resisting Hitler. Douglass also showed great empathy and respect for agnostics and atheists who cannot accept religious dogma, yet who often show great integrity in their search for the truth.

THE LAST OF THE JUST

In this *Street Spirit* interview, when asked what book had inspired him the most in his life, Douglass named *The Last of the Just* by André Schwarz-Bart. Asked why this book has such deep meaning, he replied, "Because of the evil he was dealing with: the Holocaust. And the depth of the response to it from the heart of a Jewish man — Ernie Levy in the book — who walked the path of the just person and took on the suffering of the world. For me, he became a figure like Jesus."

The Last of the Just is an eloquent and anguished account of centuries of persecution, pogroms, and massacres that Jewish people suffered at the hands of so-called Christian nations from the time of the Crusades to the death camps at Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Treblinka.

In real life, the parents of André Schwarz-Bart were deported to Auschwitz and murdered in the Nazi concentration camp. In the tremendously moving final pages of *The Last of the Just*, the novel's hero Ernie Levy is exterminated with cyanide gas in Auschwitz, along with countless Jewish children and adults.

The Last of the Just was of such paramount importance to Douglass that he devoted an entire chapter to it in *The Nonviolent Cross*. He unflinchingly confronted Catholic and Christian churches for centuries of anti-Semitism that laid the foundations for the Third Reich's genocide.

Yet it is not only the violence and prejudice of the past that concerns him. It is also the present and the future.

In *The Nonviolent Cross*, Douglass asks these piercing questions: "Why has it been so necessary to defend what men call Christianity at every step of the way with weapons of a constantly increasing barbarity? If Christians are truly repentant for their deep involvement in the Third Reich's policy of genocide, why then are they today so solidly in support of thermonuclear genocide?"

Criticizing Vatican II for not going nearly far enough in confessing the guilt of Christendom for its long history of anti-Semitic prejudice, Douglass reminds us that Jesus himself was a Jew, just like all those persecuted in Christian nations over the centuries. As André Schwarz-Bart writes, Jesus was "a simple Jew like Golda's father, a merciful man and gentle."

Douglass includes a haunting quotation from *The Last of the Just* on the dedication page of *The Nonviolent Cross*: "The Christians say they love Christ, but I think they hate him without knowing it. So they take the cross by the other end and make a sword out of it and strike us with it."

Those who read his *Street Spirit* interview to its end will learn of Douglass's peace marches and arrests in the Middle East, and will find that he is critical not only of the U.S. wars against Iraq, but also of Israel's nuclear weapons and its oppression of the Palestinian people.

The role of the peacemaker and the justice seeker is to resist any nation, whatever faith it may or may not profess, that wages unjust wars, stores nuclear weapons and commits acts of violence against civilians.

THE LAMED VAV

Everett Gendler, an American rabbi who was deeply involved in the civil rights movement and in the Jewish Peace Fellowship, wrote of Douglass's chapter on *The Last of the Just*: "Is there anywhere so moving or profound an appreciation of *The Last of the Just*? … I was so stirred that I was moved to include nearly all of it in our Yom Kippur service at the Jewish Center of Princeton, and I still find it one of the most affecting essays I have ever read."

To this day, Douglass continues to ponder the deep meaning of the novel's characterization of Ernie Levy as one of the Lamed Vav, the fabled 36 just and righteous people of Hebrew tradition.

The compassion of the Lamed Vav is essential for the life of humanity to continue, even though, according to this mystical teaching, the identities of the Lamed Vav are hidden from the world and may be unknown even to themselves.

Yet, for the sake of these 36 humble and hidden givers of justice and compassion, God preserves the world, even in the face of its cruelty, violence and injustice.

What can this mean for people who seek peace and justice, people who offer sanctuary to the homeless and food to the hungry?

Perhaps it means this: Whenever we make even a humble effort to seek peace or give mercy and compassion, more may depend on our work than we will ever know. It may be terribly important to not give up on our work for peace and justice.

It may be hidden from us, but in the long run, simple acts of kindness and compassion may matter more to humanity than we can possibly imagine.

Street Spirit Interview with Jim Douglass (Part 1)
By Terry Messman -- June 8, 2015 --
www.TheStreetSpirit.org

One Trident submarine can destroy a country. A fleet of Trident submarines is capable of destroying the world. Jim Douglass explains how Ground Zero Center organized a visionary campaign of nonviolent resistance to confront "the Auschwitz of Puget Sound."

The USS Ohio was the first Trident Ballistic Missile Submarine in 1982. Shown above in 2008, it became the first Trident to undergo a billion-dollar conversion into a guided missile submarine able to launch 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles.

INTERVIEW BY TERRY MESSMAN

Street Spirit: *While you were a professor of religion at the University of Hawaii in the late 1960s, you became active in the movement to end the Vietnam War. What led you to become involved in antiwar resistance while teaching in Hawaii?*
James Douglass: Before living in Hawaii, I lived in British Columbia in Canada for two years, writing my book *The Nonviolent Cross*. So I was out of it in terms of resistance in the United States since I wasn't living there. Going to Hawaii meant beginning to teach in a context which was also the R&R center for the military in the Vietnam War.
Spirit: *Hawaii was one of the major Rest and Recreation centers for troops during the Vietnam War?*
Douglass: Yeah, a main one, and it also was a major training ground for soldiers going to Vietnam. The Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, Hawaii, had a jungle warfare training center. The people who were responsible for the My Lai Massacre trained there, as well as people involved in many other atrocities in the Vietnam War. I had walked through it. Our community, called catholic Action of Hawaii, walked through the tunnels beneath the model village in the jungle warfare training center. [*Editor:* The peace activists named their group "catholic Action" with a lowercase "c" because they meant the name to mean "universal."]
Spirit: *The U.S. military had built models of tunnels like the Viet Cong were using in Vietnam?*
Douglass: Yes. It was set up in such a way that people being trained for Vietnam would envision each Vietnamese village as one that had tunnels everywhere beneath it, and every hut, every place where people were living, was Viet Cong — the two were equated in the jungle warfare training center. So that's the context of where I was teaching in Hawaii.
It also had Pacific Air Force headquarters. It had CINCPAC — Commander in Chief of the Pacific Command. Hawaii was where the planes that bombed Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia got their orders and targeting. So teaching in that context meant that you either were totally complicit by ignoring this source of atrocities — ongoing atrocities — or you engaged in nonviolent direct action. It was that simple in Honolulu, Hawaii, from the time I first arrived there in 1968 to the time I was last there in 1972.

Spirit: *You were teaching theology or the history of religion at the University of Hawaii during that period?*
Douglass: I was a professor of religion at the University of Hawaii's Oahu campus. I taught at the University of Hawaii from 1968 to 1969, and then I taught at the University of Notre Dame from the latter half of 1969 to 1970, and then, before I went back to Hawaii in 1971, I spent a year writing Resistance and Contemplation. So I was in Hawaii for a total of three years. The first period in 1968-69 was a period when the ground war in Vietnam was heavy and the second period of a year and a half was when the air war was becoming most intense under Nixon.

HIS STUDENTS ARE JAILED FOR DRAFT RESISTANCE

Spirit: *So you were in Hawaii during the years when opposition to the Vietnam War was at its most intense, and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement was at a flash point.*
Douglass: What happened was that on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated. At the time, I was teaching a course on the Theology of Peace. It was a seminar, a very intense group, and several of the students came in late during the first class after King's murder, and announced that they had burned their draft cards across campus at a gathering. They were forming what became known as The Hawaii Resistance, and they invited me to join their group. I did. I was being confronted by people who were taking seriously what we were exploring in our readings and discussions.

Spirit: *Your own students inspired you. In some ways, were you being taught by your own students?*
Douglass: I was totally inspired by two sources: Martin Luther King, who was the inspiration for my students and myself, and my students and other Hawaii resisters who took his death so seriously that they made a commitment to going to jail for years. They were responding in like fashion to the stand he took. Some of them did go to jail for sentences ranging from six months to a couple of years in the case of Dana Park, an inspiring draft resister who worked at a local store. Dana Park spent two years imprisoned in an Arizona desert prison. When he said no to the draft, Dana was an inspiration.

Spirit: *What impact did it have on you when your students were sentenced to long jail terms for draft resistance after King was murdered?*
Douglass: Soon I went to jail as a result of being part of their community of resistance. The Hawaii National Guard was called up within a month after the formation of the Hawaii Resistance following King's assassination. We had to decide how we would respond to troops being taken on trucks through Honolulu on their way to Schofield Barracks where they would be trained at the jungle warfare training center.

Spirit: *You mean that members of the National Guard were actually being trained and sent as combat troops to Vietnam?*
Douglass: That was not what was *said*. What was said by President Lyndon Johnson was that they were being called up to respond to the Pueblo crisis — a U.S. intelligence ship that received some fire when it came close to the mainland of Korea. But we suspected — rightly — that those National Guard troops would wind up in Vietnam. And they did.
[*Editor*: In May 1968, troops of the 299th Infantry Regiment of the Hawaii Army National Guard were called into active duty, and an estimated 1,500 National Guard soldiers from Hawaii were sent to fight in the Vietnam War.]

ANTIWAR RESISTANCE ON THE STREETS OF HONOLULU

Spirit: *How did you respond when the activation of the National Guard brought the Vietnam war to the streets of Honolulu?*
Douglass: We discussed how to respond to that into the early morning hours prior to the troops being transported through town on their way to Schofield Barracks. I argued strongly against civil disobedience. We did not have a consensus process, so we voted, and the vote was against civil disobedience. But some of the members of the Hawaii Resistance said they were going to do it anyhow.

Spirit: *Why in the world were you against civil disobedience? I mean, you had just written* The Nonviolent Cross *with the subheading, "A Theology of Revolution and Peace."*
Douglass: I think I had thoughts like, "This will alienate people. This is not the time or the place." And I'm certain that beneath all that was, "I don't want to do it." [laughing]

Spirit: *Jim Douglass, the heralded author of* The Nonviolent Cross, *wanted to sit on the sidelines? [laughing]*
Douglass: I didn't want to walk the talk of our classroom or of Martin Luther King, for that matter. [laughing]
So the next day, we stood as a group along Kalakaua Avenue in downtown Honolulu, as the National Guard trucks roared past on their way to Fort De Russy, an open fort in the center of Honolulu. I was holding a sign saying, "What Would Jesus Do?" He'd do more than carry a sign, by the way — you can put that in the interview. [laughing]

Spirit: *Will do. So did any of you do more than carry a sign?*
Douglass: It was obvious that we ought to do more. So we walked down to Fort De Russy where the troops began parading back and forth in front of the governor's stand. John Burns, the governor of the State of Hawaii, was reviewing the troops. We walked onto the field up to the governor and I told him why we felt this was wrong: These men were going to their deaths and to kill others in an unjust war. And it was wrong.
We were quickly ushered out of the fort. Then we were standing where the trucks would soon be loaded up with the soldiers. There were motorcycle police revving up their motorcycles and preparing to depart. You know the phrase, "moved by the Holy Spirit." I remember standing with everybody on the sidewalk, and then I remember us all sitting together in front of the police and the trucks.

We were photographed, identified and pulled out of the way. We weren't arrested on the spot, but a couple days later, a police officer showed up at the door of my apartment, and I was arrested and charged. And we soon went to trial.

MOVED BY THE SPIRIT

Spirit: *You had thought earlier that this wasn't really the right time to do civil disobedience, but you suddenly*

found yourself sitting in front of the troop transport trucks. What took place within you that put you in front of those trucks?
Douglass: I felt a part of a community of great people and we were making decisions together, or just instinctively doing things together. I felt no reservation whatever in working with this inspired community. And I am so glad that I was baptized by the holy movement of the Spirit in the Hawaii resistance.

Spirit: *Why are you so glad that you were moved to take part in this action?*
Douglass: Well, it changed my whole life. Can you imagine being a professor talking about nonviolence and the Vietnam War and not doing anything in Honolulu, Hawaii? What kind of a nightmare is that? So, we went to trial and were, of course, found guilty of what we obviously were doing. The judge, very ironically, sentenced all the students to a day or so, and then looked at me and said, "Since you were the ringleader, I'm giving you two weeks in jail." [laughing]

Spirit: *But you were more of a ring-follower!*
Douglass: I was the follower of my students and he gives me two weeks in jail! Anyhow, that was a further good experience, because in jail I then saw who wasn't present in my classes at the University of Hawaii. There were almost no Hawaiian students, but I was surrounded by Hawaiians in Halawa County Jail in Honolulu.

Spirit: *It was in jail that you met many native Hawaiians?*
Douglass: Yes, they were all around me. It wasn't because native Hawaiians are criminals. It's because the society I was living in was an occupied zone. Hawaii would be a free country of its own had the United States not occupied it and taken it over.
I was part of the Hawaii Resistance for a year and a half, and then I left to teach at the University of Notre Dame in the program for the study and practice of nonviolence. By the time I got back to Hawaii after a further year of writing *Resistance and Contemplation*, it was the air war that was escalating.

RESISTANCE TO THE AIR WAR IN VIETNAM

Spirit: *How did the Hawaii resistance respond to Nixon's escalating bombing strikes on Southeast Asia?*
Douglass: We formed a group called Catholic Action of Hawaii and chose, as our focus, a Lenten campaign in 1972 at Hickam Air Force Base, which has the same runways as Honolulu Airport. At that time, it was Pacific Air Force headquarters. Every day during Lent in 1972, our little group of 10 people was in front of Hickam Air Force Base passing out a new leaflet to workers going into Hickam.

We knew from members of the Air Force in Hickam who talked with us that this was the planning center for the air war in Vietnam. We began to do nonviolent civil disobedience by walking into the base and going to the different buildings inside and passing out our leaflets, and, of course, being arrested. One day, I was driving out to the Hickam base to do our leafleting in front of the base and I got into the wrong lane of traffic and drove onto the base.

Spirit: *You were actually able to drive right onto the base where the top-secret air war in Vietnam was being planned? How could that happen?*
Douglass: As I was driving in, even though I had no sticker on the front of my car, the guard waved me in. I guess he made a mistake. So I parked my car at the main building of the Pacific Air Force headquarters, and I thought, well I'll do a little experiment with truth, using Gandhi's term. I walked inside and nobody stopped me.
I saw a directory on the wall and I saw that one of the rooms was "Directorate of Electronic Warfare." We knew what the directorate of electronic warfare meant. We had a slideshow on electronic warfare. The Air Force could send out planes and robotic devices that would drop terrible weapons onto the jungles which could spray tiny pellets over an area the size of several football fields. And, of course, the electronic devices could be activated by an animal passing by, or a Viet Cong soldier, or a child going to get some water. That was a crime and a sin.

Spirit: *Didn't your attorneys later argue in court that this form of electronic warfare was a war crime under the Nuremberg principles?*
Douglass: Sure. That's a war crime that would cause the obliteration of civilians indiscriminately, just by the nature of the weapon. There was no knowledge whatever as to what they would be bombing. It was all done by these electronic devices. We knew the results of that bombing because of people who were talking to the victims. So we knew all about electronic warfare in Vietnam and here was the office for electronic warfare in the Pacific region in this very building.

POURING BLOOD ON TOP-SECRET MILITARY FILES

So when I came out of the building and went back to our group, we decided to take a further step. We donated blood, and three members of our group, Jim Albertini, Chuck Giuli and I, drove into the Hickam Air Force Base one day, and Jim Albertini and I went into the same

building. He went into one office and I went into the office that said "Directorate of Electronic Warfare."

When I came into the office, there was a major at a desk. His name was Major LaFrance, as I learned when he testified at the trial. I gave him an envelope with our statement inside explaining why we were pouring blood on these files. Can you imagine writing this statement with the prayerful hope that we would be able to do that action? How on earth were we going to do that?

He took the envelope. It was addressed "Commanding Officer, Directorate of Electronic Warfare." And he walked into the next office. I looked behind his desk and there was a huge file cabinet. It said, "Top Secret" across it. I had my briefcase with a coke bottle full of blood in it. The file cabinet was wide open. There was a big lock on it but it was wide open. So I just walked back and poured the blood all over the files. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor and he was choking me.

Spirit: *Pouring blood on top secret documents must have been controversial at the time. What was the symbolism of pouring blood on the military files?*
Douglass: Because the files already had blood on them — the blood of the people of Vietnam. And we wanted to make clear that the blood of the people of Vietnam was our blood as well, and they were connected with our lives.

Spirit: *It must have been startling when the major knocked you to the ground and began choking you.*
Douglass: He had come from behind. I didn't see him coming, and then he had thrown me down and was choking me. We had role-played it earlier in a session with our group. We spent all day roleplaying all kinds of things, and that was one of the things we roleplayed: if somebody threw you down. I knew both instinctively and by our roleplaying, that it was time to relax. And I was happy because I never imagined that we would actually be able to do this action.

He let up because I don't think he wanted to choke somebody. Then I realized that there was a group of quite a few people standing around us in a circle. All these other people had come from nearby offices after hearing the commotion. Then he stood over me and he told me, "Wipe it up — there's blood all over."

I said, "That's impossible."

He knew immediately what I meant. He said, "Don't give me any of your philosophy." What an insightful person! [laughing] Then he picked up my legs and he used my hair as a mop to wipe up the blood. Strange as it may seem, I wasn't arrested. I was released and I was back teaching at the University of Hawaii the next day.

CONSPIRACY AND DESTRUCTION OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

Spirit: *Did they arrest you later or prosecute you for this action?*
Douglass: When I came back to our house in a low-cost area of Waikiki after teaching during the day, I had walked in without noticing that there were a couple of unusual cars outside. The FBI agents from the cars broke down the door and came in and arrested me. I was taken and charged with destruction of government property and conspiracy and so forth — several felony charges.

Major LaFrance may be retired, and for all I know, he'll read this article and say, "I remember that!" If so, God bless you, Major LaFrance, you were my favorite witness at the trial.

Spirit: *Why was the major your favorite witness?*
Douglass: Because in the trial, I was my own lawyer and I was responsible for questioning Major LaFrance. So I asked him just to describe what happened that day. He was quite truthful. He said exactly what occurred and then he got to the point where I was wondering if he was going to be explicit about picking me up and wiping the floor with my hair. [laughing] When I asked him what happened next, he said, "I performed a symbolic action."

Spirit: *He must have read your book. He took a page right out of it.*
Douglass: He was taking off from our description of our action. He performed a symbolic action! He was a great witness.

Spirit: *What was the outcome of your trial?*
Douglass: The judge at our trial, Judge Martin Pence, was a very conservative man. We discerned he was not going to allow us to examine the evidence against us. The evidence against us, of course, were the bloody files, and that was our evidence against the government because we were claiming those files contained evidence of U.S. war crimes.

So for our trial preparations, we were planning to use an international law defense: We were blocking a war crime. We invited experts from the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal to come to Honolulu, Hawaii, and two of them did. [Mary Kaufman and Benjamin Ferencz, two of the prosecuting attorneys for the United States against Nazis accused of war crimes at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal after World War II, agreed to act as co-counsel at the trial.]

Jim and Shelley Douglass at a recent protest near the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a weapons facility that produces all uranium parts for U.S. nuclear weapons. From left to right, Br. Utsumi Shonin, the late Jesuit Father Bill Bichsel, Sr. Denise Laffin, Shelley Douglass and Jim Douglass. This photo was taken at a recent protest near the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a weapons facility that produces all uranium parts for U.S. nuclear weapons.

JUDGE LOSES CONTROL OF COURTROOM

In preparation for the trial, we anticipated that the government was going to try to circumvent that defense by not bringing in the [military] files, and that the judge would rule in their favor. When that was about to happen in a pretrial hearing, the entire community was present. It extended beyond the 10 or so members of our catholic Action group. The courtroom was packed. So when the judge began to say that the government didn't have to bring the files into court — which was in violation of the rules of evidence — people in the courtroom began to protest to the judge.

He lost control of the courtroom and he finally cleared the court so there was nobody left there except for the judge and the defendants. We were also outside the court every day fasting and with signs protesting against this withdrawing of the files and beyond that, protesting the air war in Vietnam which was the ultimate purpose of all of this — and not whether we were going to go to prison, as we expected to.

Judge Pence then withdrew from the case, which was amazing.

Spirit: *Why did the judge withdraw? I've almost never heard of that happening in a civil disobedience trial.*
Douglass: He had lost control of the courtroom and so he withdrew from the case. I don't have a very good explanation, to this day, except that the Spirit was working. He was replaced by Judge Samuel King, a man who had just been appointed by President Nixon, and our trial was his first case as a federal judge. He changed the ruling and said we did have a right to examine those files.

Spirit: *It was an almost unbelievable turn of events that let the truth get out at your trial.*
Douglass: I don't know how all of this came to pass, but it did come to pass! The government then was on the horns of a dilemma. They were about to drop the whole case.

Spirit: *They were going to drop it because the federal government didn't want to release in a public courtroom the military documents that you had poured blood on?*
Douglass: They weren't going to disclose those files in the court. They didn't want us to examine those files and make a case against them with experts in international law coming to Honolulu. This was all over the front pages of the newspapers, and it had become an important issue in Hawaii. So we had already gotten to the first purpose of our campaign, which was to break through the silence.

[*Editor*: Judge King allowed virtually all of the witnesses to testify for the antiwar defendants. Nuremberg attorney Mary Kaufman later called it "the most startling testimony ever given in a U.S. courtroom on the war in Vietnam." At the trial, a former Air Force sergeant testified that while he was stationed at Hickam Air Base in Hawaii, he had witnessed "the deliberate targeting of a Laotian hospital for obliteration bombing, as well as the targeting of numerous other civilian objectives."]

Spirit: *At that time, peace activists were trying to make the public aware of the full extent of the saturation bombing.*
Douglass: The bombing of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was going on silently, in terms of the connection between Honolulu and Indochina. So we had broken through that silence with our trial. But we wanted the trial to continue.
The government prosecutors withdrew the felony charges which would have been five years apiece for conspiracy and destruction of government property, for a total of 10 or 15 years. They lowered the felony charges to misdemeanors. So six months became the maximum sentences. We went to trial and, of course, were found guilty.

'WE NON-COOPERATED WITH EVERYTHING'

Spirit: *You were sentenced to six months in prison?*
Douglass: Yes, we were sentenced to the maximum six months, which was suspended on condition of our paying fines of $500 each and reporting to our probation officers and fulfilling all the conditions of probation — none of which we did. We non-cooperated with everything we were given.
As part of that noncooperation, I had already resigned my job at the University of Hawaii in preparation for going to jail for several years for these felony charges. My resignation was effective at the end of the following semester, so Shelley and I moved back to our home in British Columbia.

I had already refused to pay the $500 fine, so by moving I was in violation of the probation order that you're not allowed to travel without permission of your probation officer. We just went ahead and moved. Prior to that, I had made a trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, in violation of travel restrictions, to participate in an international war crimes tribunal that focused on the U.S. bombing of Indochina. And this was all done publicly. They tried to ignore it, but it was done publicly.

Spirit: *They were trying to defuse the impact of your resistance by ignoring the noncooperation? Did they ever arrest you?*
Douglass: By the time Shelley and I moved back to British Columbia, a warrant was issued for my arrest. So, for the next several years, we lived in Hedley, this little mining town in British Columbia, while I worked on another book, *Resistance and Contemplation*. Anytime I went across the U.S. border I was liable to be arrested. And I was arrested eventually, of course.
The Hawaii action took place in 1972 and I was arrested in 1975. Shelley and I had gone to the Los Angeles Catholic Worker to speak at a Day of Nonviolence held down there in 1974, and they advertised it publicly. But the FBI was a bit late. They came a few days after I'd been there, and by that time we were back in British Columbia.

But the following year, in 1975, I was invited to speak in Los Angeles at another Day of Nonviolence and this time, when I was speaking in the auditorium, a group of men in suits walked in from the back of the auditorium and announced that they were members of the FBI. I asked them to please sit down because I wasn't going anywhere. They did sit down and I gave my talk against the Vietnam War.

Then they came up and arrested me and took me out to their waiting cars. By that time, the audience was well organized and they blocked the cars for about half an hour, and they had to call in the Los Angeles Police Department to get out of the parking lot. I was then taken back to Honolulu for a resentencing for my violations of probation. The day I was arrested in Honolulu was the same date as the last demonstration against the Vietnam War at the White House at which Shelley was arrested for the charge "failure to quit."

When I went before the judge, the courtroom was filled with friends and they were again prepared to noncooperate in some way when the judge sentenced me to six months in prison, just as they had when we originally were on trial. Judge King said, "For your failure to fulfill the conditions of your probation, I sentence you to an unconditional probation." And he walked out of the courtroom! That was the end of that! [laughing]

Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Resist Trident. Poster art courtesy Ground Zero Center

THE TRIDENT CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Spirit: *When you learned that the naval base in Bangor, Washington, would be the home port for Trident submarines, were you guided by Gandhi's vision of nonviolence in forming Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action?*
Douglass: Yes, we were very specifically guided. We studied Gandhi, and we based everything in the Trident campaign, and then in the succeeding Tracks campaign, on the Gandhian understanding of a satyagraha campaign.

When Narayan Desai (Gandhi's secretary and biographer) came to visit us, it was at a critical moment when we were struggling with all of that. We sought at every step of the way, from the beginning of the campaign, to recognize that the people on the other side of the fence — in this case, quite literally, the fence between Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action and the Trident submarine base — were our brothers and our sisters.

In those days, it was always, "The Russians! The Russians! They're the enemy." So that justifies weapons that could destroy all of humanity to "deter" the other side by fear — the Russians. The nuclear weapons in our midst threaten us as much as they do the other side. There's nothing more suicidal than a nuclear weapon. We have to build a campaign to overcome our denial of the reality of nuclear weapons, and our denial of how they function to create fear in our own lives and fear of the so-called enemy.

Therefore, we organized a campaign around a base that was invisible, even though it's only about eight miles across the water from Seattle. We tried to bring home to all of us what this nuclear base means. So we lived next to it. That's the nature of Ground Zero, and that's the nature of Shelley and my moving into the last house alongside the railroad tracks going into the Trident submarine base.

THE CONSCIENCE OF ROBERT ALDRIDGE

Spirit: *Out of all the issues of war and peace you might have focused on after the Vietnam War, what led you to focus so wholeheartedly on resistance to the Trident submarine?*
Douglass: One person: Robert Aldridge, with the strong support of his wife, Janet, and their ten children. Unless I say the name Robert Aldridge, none of it makes sense. Aldridge was a key designer of the Trident missile system at Lockheed Missiles and Space Corporation at the Sunnyvale Plant in California. He and Janet met with Shelley and me in Honolulu, Hawaii, when he came to support us in the Hickam Three trial. When we met them, we did not know he was a key designer of the Trident missile system.
While attending a public forum during that trial, Robert Aldridge was asked to comment on the statements made by the Nuremberg prosecuting attorneys who came to help us in the trial. Mary Kaufman and Benjamin Ferencz, two of the attorneys during the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, defended us at our trial because they said we were acting in obedience to the Nuremberg principles by pouring blood on top-secret electronic warfare files in order to bring them to the attention of the American public.
Robert Aldridge was struck silent at that forum, and we never asked him about it. But several years later, when he came to visit us in our home in Hedley, British Columbia, he told us he had recognized that he was a war criminal by what the Nuremberg prosecutors said in that forum.

Spirit: *What did the Nuremberg attorneys say about war crimes that had such a life-changing impact on Robert Aldridge?*
Douglass: They said that first-strike weapons and weapons that directly violate a civilian population were war crimes in violation of the Nuremberg principles. Those Nuremberg principles, which are a foundation of international law, are violated both by electronic warfare — which is why we poured our blood on the files for electronic warfare — and also by the Trident nuclear missile system, which is what Robert Aldridge was designing.

Spirit: *So when Aldridge visited you and Shelley, he actually told you that he had become aware of his involvement in war crimes during your trial in Hawaii?*
Douglass: Yes. And we were not the only part of this process. His daughter, Janie, as a high school student, was beginning to demonstrate against the Vietnam War, and she told him one time after dinner, "Dad, I may be demonstrating against your work soon." So the combination of what he heard from both his daughter in high school and the experience at our Hickam trial moved Bob and Janet to hold a retreat with their children the following Christmas. And the family reached a decision that Dad — Bob — had to resign his job, and the whole family would have to take the cut in income and lifestyle. And all of them would have to take on the responsibility to change their lives.
So, at the age of 49, Robert Aldridge resigned his job after having worked at Lockheed Missiles and Space Corporation for his full adult life.

When he came up to our home in Canada to tell us about all that, we then asked, "Well, what's Trident?" He said, putting the map on our kitchen table, "It's the submarine missile system that will be based right here." And he pointed to a spot that wasn't very far from us on the other side of the border (between the U.S. and Canada). That was the beginning of the Trident campaign.

A missile is fired from a Trident submarine. Lockheed missile designer Robert Aldridge determined that the accuracy, short flight time and explosive power of Trident missiles give the Trident submarine a first-strike capability.

Spirit: *I understand that first-strike weapons of mass destruction are war crimes under Nuremberg principles. But why did Aldridge conclude that Trident was a first-strike weapon?*
Douglass: Bob Aldridge was designing the part of Trident that was specifically for a first-strike capability: the precise targeting of the multiple reentry vehicles in each missile. He was designing the ability of each reentry vehicle (with its hydrogen bomb) to home in on an underground missile silo in the Soviet Union and destroy it — before its missile could be launched. And do you design a weapon to destroy an empty missile silo?

No! That kind of accuracy was needed in order to destroy a missile silo before the weapon is fired from the silo. Robert Aldridge was a smart man, and he realized that Trident's accuracy and short flight time means a first-strike weapon. So he identified all of that in hearing that a war launched by the Nazis fit the same category of war crimes as the Vietnam War, which his daughter was demonstrating against, and the missile system that he was designing at Lockheed. It all fit together.

Spirit: *Along with the first-strike accuracy of its missiles, the Trident submarine also has a destructive power that would indiscriminately kill millions of civilians.*
Douglass: Yes, even if you hit all those missile silos that were necessary in a first strike, you would also destroy over 100 million Soviet citizens. That's a war crime in another sense, and in the most devastating sense of all.

Spirit: *You wrote in* Lighting East to West *that a single Trident submarine could incinerate millions of civilians and had as much destructive power as hundreds of Hiroshima bombs.*
Douglass: A single Trident submarine had 24 missiles, and each missile was capable of carrying eight independently targeted nuclear warheads — meaning hydrogen bombs. Doing the math, eight times 24 is 192 warheads on one submarine, and each of those hydrogen bombs had 38 times more destructive power than the Hiroshima bomb.

One Trident submarine can destroy a country, even a huge country like the Soviet Union. At that time, 20 Trident submarines were scheduled to be built, and then you have a weapon that is capable of destroying the world many times over.

And that was before we even took into consideration the concept of nuclear winter. Through the use of nuclear weapons in a first strike, or for that matter, in any attack, we would create a nuclear winter around the globe, destroying the capacity for any human life at all to exist.

Street Spirit Interview with Jim Douglass (Part 2)
By Terry Messman -- June 8, 2015 --
www.TheStreetSpirit.org

When Father Dave Becker came to dinner at the home of Jim and Shelley Douglass next to the Trident base, the first sentence he said after he sat down on the sofa was, "I want to understand from you what it means to be the chaplain of the Auschwitz of Puget Sound."

"When scientific power outruns spiritual power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men." — Martin Luther King. Photo: Ground Zero Center

Street Spirit: *After Robert Aldridge alerted you that first-strike Trident nuclear submarines would be based near Seattle, what were the first steps in planning a campaign that could resist such an overwhelming weapons system?*
James Douglass: Number one, every worker on the Trident nuclear submarine base is Robert Aldridge.
Spirit: *A potential Robert Aldridge, meaning a person of conscience?*
Douglass: Yes, potentially. Therefore we must respect, understand and grow in truth through dialogue with every worker, and every civilian military employee on the Trident nuclear submarine base. We lived alongside it and worked alongside it. So everything we did had to fulfill that purpose.

On the one hand, we had to block the system — that systemic violence we're talking about. That's the Trident system which could literally destroy the world through nuclear fire and radioactivity. We had to block that through nonviolent and loving resistance.

And secondly, we had to engage in dialogue and respectful relationships with the people who were involved in that system, just as all of us were, and are, involved.

We are all involved. That goes from paying taxes, which we all do, even those of us who are military tax resisters because they collect the taxes in other ways. And through our silence, which we all do to the extent that we all aren't constantly out there speaking against the evils in our society. And the number one evil is our capacity to destroy all life on earth, since we are U.S. citizens with the most powerful arsenal ever devised.

So on the one hand, *resistance*. On the other hand, *dialogue*.

THE TRIDENT PEACE BLOCKADE

Spirit: *Let's look at these two dimensions — resistance and dialogue. What forms of resistance did Ground Zero organize that were visionary enough to confront an entire fleet of first-strike nuclear submarines?*
Douglass: Well, we decided in our little group, the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, to create our own navy to block the U.S. Navy that was bringing the submarines into the Trident base. Our navy consisted of two sailboats and 20 rowboats. You know all about this, to put it mildly, because you were there on the boat. [laughing]

We had the Pacific Peacemaker, a sailboat that had come all the way from Australia to join the boat blockade, and the Lizard of Woz, a trimarin sailboat. The Pacific Peacemaker and the Lizard of Woz were the two larger boats, and we also had 20 rowboats, most of them to be strung out behind the Pacific Peacemaker and a few to be thrown into the water from the deck of the Lizard of Woz.

Our basic strategy was to block the Trident submarine with this small navy. But all our boats were stopped by the Navy's pre-emptive attack.

Spirit: *The Navy and Coast Guard sent 99 ships to attack our little boats when we tried to block the USS Ohio. Seattle newspapers reported they had sent out a larger fleet than most of the navies in the world.*
Douglass: Well, the 99 Coast Guard boats were all the Coast Guard boats on the West Coast of the United States. They didn't have any Coast Guard boats anywhere else on that day. They had them all in the area of Seattle in order to stop our ragtag fleet.

That was our first major experiment with truth on the waters of Puget Sound. They did a pre-emptive attack before the Trident sub reached our blockade.

We knew it was coming because of a good bunch of Paul Reveres who were stationed along the Hood Canal at the end of the journey, and also through the Strait of Juan de Fuca going out to the Pacific Ocean. And we had observers through the Panama Canal. So we knew when the Trident submarine was coming to the day.

Spirit: *I'll never forget when we were awakened before dawn on August 12, 1982, and heard that the submarine was approaching us.*
Douglass: It came in the dawn hours. And they did pre-emptive arrests of all of us on those two flagships before the sub was in our immediate vicinity. We were put into a little camp by the Trident base, and felony charges were filed against all of us, and within a few days the charges were dropped.

Spirit: *There were two different felony charges filed, so we faced at least two five-year prison sentences, as I recall.*
Douglass: Yes, and in fact, you and I got a couple of the heaviest penalties because we were charged with attacking a member of the U.S. Navy or something like that, because after we had already been arrested and handcuffed, we tried to jump off the boat to swim in front of the fleet. [laughing] You were charged with a higher one and so was I.

Spirit: *All we were trying to do was jump over the side and swim to block the Trident. We didn't try to attack a guard.*
Douglass: No, but we were charged with that felony.

Spirit: *Did you ever figure out why they dropped the felony charges against all the defendants?*
Douglass: Well, because they didn't want to engage us in court, where we would bring up everything to do with the Trident submarine, and Bob Aldridge would have come and testified. The whole issue would have been publicized in a big way in Seattle, just as the Hickam action had become front-page news for a full week in Honolulu.

Spirit: *Also, among the defendants we had people like Ruth Nelson, a 78-year-old woman who had been named Mother of the Year.*
Douglass: Oh, Ruth Nelson was a beautiful woman.

Spirit: *They didn't want to have people like that on the stand talking about how the Coast Guard had used machine guns and water cannons to arrest us.*
Douglass: They certainly did not.

Spirit: T*he U.S. government also created a new "national security" felony that if you were within 1,000 yards of the submarine you could be sentenced to five years.*
Douglass: It was created specifically for the purpose of stopping the Trident peace blockade.

Spirit: *Ground Zero also organized several massive demonstrations where hundreds were arrested for climbing the fence into the Trident base.*
Douglass: Yes, there were literally hundreds who did that on several occasions. There were huge demonstrations involving thousands who came to the rallies and then hundreds who climbed over the fence.

Spirit: *In October of 1979, thousands came from all over the country to commit civil disobedience at the base.*
Douglass: During an earlier demonstration, the base chose to arrest one person in particular — it happened to be me — and to avoid arresting the hundreds of people who were inside the white line. In other words, they did a selective arrest process. The people who had crossed the white line were arrested and taken into custody and then released without being charged.

Spirit: *How did Ground Zero respond to the selective arrest?*
Douglass: In a second huge demonstration several months later (on October 28, 1979), having recognized what was going on in the first set of arrests with the charges being dropped, they all came back after they were released and got arrested a second time. So the selective arrest process didn't work. On that occasion we had a mass trial.

There were about 200 people arrested. At the mass trial, a lot of those people were given minor sentences or paid a fine. Many of them paid the fine because they lived so far away they couldn't come to the trial. As you know, some people like you and I were sent to jail for six months. And that's where Terry Messman and I spent quite a bit of time together. By the way, for all of you who are out there, he's the same guy that's interviewing me now. [laughing]

Spirit: *You and I and Karl Zanzig, who was also arrested at the Trident base, all served six-month sentences in Boron federal prison. Karl and I took a class in nonviolence you gave at the prison.*
Douglass: You have a better memory than I have! [laughing]

Spirit: *I'll never forget it. You were teaching the insights that later appeared in your book,* Lightning East to West. *You said that nonviolent movements needed to discover the moral equivalent of Einstein's equation for converting matter into energy.*

Einstein's formula changed the world by showing the conversion of mass to energy. Sculpture of Einstein's formula in Berlin, Germany.

"THE AUSCHWITZ OF PUGET SOUND"

Spirit: *Just before I was released from prison in July 1981, I was buoyed when Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen likened the Trident submarine to the Auschwitz death camp.*
Douglass: The most important resister in the Trident campaign — to single out one person other than Robert Aldridge — was Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen.

Spirit: *Why was Hunthausen such a significant voice in the movement for nuclear disarmament?*
Douglass: He gave a speech in which he stated to a very large number of religious leaders gathered in Tacoma, Washington, that Trident was the "Auschwitz of Puget Sound." And he took a stand of refusing to pay his income taxes in order to resist Trident.

Spirit: *After he made that statement, we invited him to speak at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley where he urged hundreds of religious leaders to resist nuclear murder and suicide.*
Douglass: Yes. And as a result, roughly six months later, he actually stated publicly, "I have now decided to stop paying half of my taxes" — the half of his taxes that would have gone to military appropriations and nuclear weapons.

Spirit: *It was such an important turning point when an archbishop actually called for massive civil disobedience.*
Douglass: Yes, and he not only called for it — he did it! His tax resistance was nonviolent civil disobedience in the most radical sense possible.

Spirit: *When Archbishop Hunthausen declared that Trident was the Auschwitz of Puget Sound, what effect did it have on your work at Ground Zero? And what effect did it have on the general public?*
Douglass: It electrified the general public. And it profoundly encouraged us. We all knew Archbishop Hunthausen. We'd known him for years and he'd already done all kinds of things to support our work. He supported a 30-day fast that we engaged in. He sent information on the Trident campaign to his entire body of priests and religious leaders in the diocese.
He brought over to Ground Zero all of his administrative leaders in the archdiocese for a retreat on the issue of Trident. He'd done everything he could — up to refusing to pay his own taxes — before he took that step. So we were one in community with Archbishop Hunthausen before he took that further step.

Spirit: *What was the response of the Church hierarchy to Hunthausen's call for massive resistance to the arms race?*
Douglass: Well, I would say it was a mixed response. A number of Catholic bishops within the United States made statements of their own against nuclear weapons in the months following Archbishop Hunthausen's statement. I think they were to some degree, if not largely, inspired by his courage. I found that remarkable because there had been so much silence before then.

Spirit: *Silence from church leaders about the threat of nuclear weapons?*
Douglass: So much silence from religious leaders across the board, and certainly from Catholic bishops. So I found that very encouraging. I would read one statement after another about nuclear weapons, and that led up eventually to "The Challenge of Peace," the Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear weapons.

Spirit: *The bishop's letter gave so much hope to the peace movement in 1983. And you believe that Hunthausen's statement played a role in inspiring the bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear weapons?*
Douglass: It played a HUGE role in the process that resulted in the bishops' statement. Hunthausen played a HUGE role. He would never say that, obviously.

THE PROPHETS: ARCHBISHOPS HUNTHAUSEN AND MATTHIESEN

Spirit: *In what way did Hunthausen's statement play such a huge role in the bishops speaking out?*
Douglass: There was nothing vaguely like Archbishop Hunthausen's statement before him. And following his statement there were many!
The only bishop in the U.S. who closely paralleled Archbishop Hunthausen, and actually became a very good friend of his, was Bishop (Leroy) Matthiesen in Amarillo, Texas. And of course, they were bishops at the opposite ends of the tracks of the White Train.

Spirit: T*he Pantex plant in Amarillo assembled the hydrogen bombs in Bishop Matthiesen's diocese, then shipped them to Hunthausen's diocese near Seattle?*

Douglass: Amarillo is where the Pantex plant exists, and that is the final assembly point for all nuclear weapons in the United States.

It was an extraordinary connection to have Bishop Matthiesen at one end of the tracks encouraging workers at the Pantex plant to resign their jobs and take more peaceful occupations, and Archbishop Hunthausen at the other end of the tracks at the Trident base taking the step of tax resistance and denouncing Trident as the Auschwitz of Puget Sound.

The two of them came to our house at the end of the tracks and held a retreat for a group of us one weekend as part of the Tracks campaign. That was very inspiring.

Spirit: *It must have been amazing to have both Hunthausen and Matthiesen with you at Ground Zero. They were heroes of the peace movement — two of the most courageous voices we ever had.*
Douglass: And they sent out a letter over their signatures to all of the Catholic bishops in the dioceses along the train tracks. And it resulted in 11 or 12 bishops along the tracks joining in their statement encouraging people to take a stand against the nuclear arms race and the train shipments. When the bishops made that statement together, it was reported on the front page of the *New York Times.*

Spirit: *Archbishop Hunthausen not only influenced Catholic leaders. When we invited him as a keynote speaker at Pacific School of Religion, he inspired hundreds of Protestant church leaders with his call to resistance.*
Douglass: Archbishop Hunthausen really was a catalyst in a movement of religious leaders, not only Catholics but others as well. Remember that the statement in which he began to become so prominent was made to the Lutheran leaders of the Pacific Northwest. He wasn't speaking to Catholics; he was speaking to the Lutheran leaders who had invited him to speak because he had already become a leader on this issue. That's when he made the statement that gained national attention.

He had an effect on everybody. In the Pacific Northwest, especially, he was meeting every week with all the other key religious leaders. They ate breakfast together. I joined them a number of times so I met these people and Archbishop Hunthausen was the most prophetic voice and the inspiration in their midst. These were all the most prominent religious leaders at that time in Seattle and everyone at these breakfasts was very supportive of Archbishop Hunthausen. The Jewish leaders were very supportive of Archbishop Hunthausen. So it was right across the board that religious leaders said, "This man is speaking out in a way that is both prophetic and pastoral."

Spirit: *I understand his prophetic role, but what were they referring to in saying he was also "pastoral" in regards to the nuclear issue?*
Douglass: They meant the way that he responded to people who were critical of him. He came over to the areas right around the Trident base and went to the different parishes and listened to all the people who were wondering why he was making such statements. He, of course, explained that this is the way he understood the Gospel, but he said that very gently and compassionately and listened to everything that they had to say.

Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action still continues to be very active in working for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE CHAPLAIN AT AUSCHWITZ

Spirit: *Did Archbishop Hunthausen's call to resist the arms race have much effect on workers on the Trident base?*
Douglass: I will give an example of the impact he had. I was passing out leaflets in front of the Trident base, as we did every week to the cars and the drivers coming into the base, and a man with a clerical collar on stopped as I was handing him a leaflet. He said, "I want to have dinner with you."

Well, that was an unusual response. He had dinner with Shelley and me a few days later. He was the Catholic chaplain of the Trident nuclear submarine base, Father David Becker. So he came to dinner at our Tracks house located alongside the Trident base where the railroad tracks go in.

When Father Dave Becker came in, the first sentence he said after he sat down on the sofa was, "I want to understand from you what it means to be the chaplain of the Auschwitz of Puget Sound."

Spirit: *What a question! How could you even answer a question life that?*
Douglass: We just had dinner together and talked. And that process was the dialogue that Gandhi talked about as the experiment in truth with the person on the other side of the fence — which was the point of our whole campaign.

And through that dialogue, Father Dave engaged in a dialogue with his church. And where were the people of his church? On the Trident base! On one Sunday, alternately, he would preach about Trident as he was learning to understand it, and the nature of Trident, which was to threaten and eventually, if carried out in its purpose, to destroy the world.

On the following Sunday, he would dialogue and very peacefully engage in conversation with his church community. He was doing the same thing in his church that we were doing in relation to the whole Trident process. He was confronting and resisting the evil, and dialoguing with all of us who are involved in that evil.

Spirit: *What was the outcome of his speaking out so strongly against nuclear arms while he was a chaplain on the naval base?*
Douglass: He resigned his commission and his chaplaincy on the base, and then became a priest in the diocese outside the base. That was, of course, from the inspiration of Archbishop Hunthausen.

Spirit: *So he resigned when he realized that a chaplain at Auschwitz was not what was needed. What was needed was a conscientious objector.*
Douglass: Now let me tell you the reason why he asked me that question as he was driving into the base. He had just received a full copy of Archbishop Hunthausen's address to the Lutheran leaders in Tacoma, Washington. Archbishop Hunthausen sent the statement to every priest in the diocese and, of course, one of them was the chaplain of the Trident base, Father Dave Becker. Well, Dave Becker got his copy inside the Trident base. It went right through the mail into the Trident base. He read it in his office and he was electrified, as were all of these other people outside the base.

Then he asked himself, "My God, what does it mean for me to be the chaplain of the Auschwitz of Puget Sound?" So he resigned his commission and he became a pastor in a church outside the base. He is an example of dozens of people who did that and who then subsequently became extended members of the Ground Zero community.

Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Courtesy Ground Zero Center

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS TO NUCLEAR WAR

Spirit: *So there were several other conscientious objectors who resigned?*
Douglass: There were several other Catholics who were deeply influenced by Archbishop Hunthausen and who resigned from the Bangor Naval Base. Archbishop Hunthausen was the voice that they were listening to especially. Many of these people, including Father Dave Becker, did interviews with us.

We would interview these folks who resigned their jobs and then we would put those interviews in our Ground Zero newspaper and leaflet that newspaper to the 2,000 Trident employees who took our leaflets every week. It was a circular process.

They stopped working at the Trident base and stated publicly that they were taking that step. I'm not even counting the people who never let us know about it. I think there were far more than those who did let us know about it. We know of about a dozen who left.

Spirit: *It must have been a great sacrifice for them to resign. Are there any compelling stories that show why they would take such a difficult step?*
Douglass: Every one of them is a compelling story. Let me give one example. Mona Lee was a worker on the Trident base, as was her husband, and she lived alongside the Trident base. She had received many of our leaflets as she was going into the Trident base.
One day in the Trident base, she was given a tour with other base employees of the Strategic Weapons Facility

Pacific, the highest security area where the nuclear weapons are located. Mona touched a nuclear weapon that day and she suddenly realized, as she put it: "This is real."

From that point on, her life moved in a different direction. She was, and is, a Quaker. Her Quaker beliefs had never connected with nuclear weapons until she touched one. She became a person at Ground Zero in dialogue with us. She did an interview with us. She resigned her job.

She became, years later, a leader in the WTO demonstration in Seattle, Washington. [Editor: On November 30, 1999, tens of thousands of people staged massive street protests of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle.]

Spirit: *What a journey she took.*
Douglass: She became a leader! Many other people congregated around her and her new husband. Her old marriage ended. She also became a leader in creating the transit system between downtown Seattle and Sea-Tac Airport — a beautiful light rail system. Then she and her husband started a coffeehouse right alongside it.

Spirit: *Many nonviolent campaigns do not develop an ongoing dialogue with the people on the other side of the issue. Can you describe how you created a dialogue with workers on the Trident base?*
Douglass: We leafleted every week. The fence between our side of the issue and their side of the issue — the fence between the Trident base and Ground Zero — was being overcome by our dialogue with those workers, and by the leafleting we did every week, to a point where 2,000 people a week were taking our leaflets. As a result, there were a series of resignations on their part. That's how a real nonviolent campaign advances.

In the course of that process, the base authorities, and the naval authorities above them, tried to stop our leafleting by arresting us when we were inside the white line for trespassing on the base. So we leafleted outside the white line and we were then arrested by the county sheriffs for endangering traffic. And we couldn't leaflet in mid-air, so we were alternately arrested by the base authorities for trespass on the naval base and by Kitsap County sheriffs for blocking traffic.

Spirit: *How did the workers going into the base respond to your leafleting?*
Douglass: The number-one thing was that when we were arrested, civilian workers at the Trident base who were getting our leaflets when they were driving into the base, testified at our trials in our support. And they were risking their jobs and their security and everything else.

ALLIES IN UNLIKELY PLACES

Spirit: *It seems amazing that workers at the Trident base would break the silence by testifying during your trial.*
Douglass: As a result of that process, the Kitsap County sheriffs who were part of the testimony at our trial — they had to come in and testify against us — the same sheriffs who were arresting us, and in some cases literally cursing us as they arrested us, became our good friends.

We had to sit around together in all of this process of going through the trial, and we talked together and dialogued together. And then they would testify that we were standing in such and such a place, and we were found guilty in all of those instances, and the judge would send us to jail.

Spirit: *Well, since their testimony sent you to jail, in what way are you saying they became friends?*
Douglass: Because eventually the sheriff refused to cooperate with the Navy!

Spirit: *That almost never happens in a peace action. In what way did the sheriffs refuse to cooperate with the Navy?*
Douglass: The key moment came when we were charged in a further act of civil disobedience with blocking a train. We sat in front of a train carrying nuclear weapons going into the Trident base. We were charged with conspiracy to block a train, as well as being charged with blocking a train. So in the course of the trial, which was in a Kitsap County courtroom before a Kitsap County judge, the sheriffs had to testify to prove the charge of conspiracy.

They described all the meetings they had with us, because we told them everything we were going to do about blocking the train. We didn't want the train to run over us, and they and we — together — planned how we would block the train in such a way that the train would stop, and they would arrest us. In other words, we tried not to create a situation where either they or we would get run over by a train, which had almost happened at the demonstration before that one.

So in the course of the trial, it became obvious to the judge and the jury that at the heart of the conspiracy were the Kitsap County sheriffs!

Spirit: *Because they were involved in planning the action with you? So what did the judge do when he realized that?*
Douglass: The judge dismissed the conspiracy charge! Because everything that we did, the sheriffs were doing —except sitting in front of the train at the end. But so far

as conspiring, planning the action, they did it as much as we did.

That's the whole nature of the Trident campaign: to work together with the other side. We were working together with the sheriffs. Now some people in the movement hated that because they said, "You can't do anything with the other side."

And we said, "Well, of course, we have to. We don't want them to get run over by a train anymore than we want to. And you all saw that in the last demonstration we had, it got out of hand and people were almost literally killed."

Spirit: *Did the judge throw out all the charges or just the conspiracy charges?*
Douglass: He dismissed the charges of conspiracy. Then the jury heard all the evidence for why we were blocking the train, and they found us not guilty. We had confessed to everything about blocking the train, and the jury found us not guilty! How did they manage to do that?

Spirit: *Obviously, that's my next question too. How did the jury manage to find you not guilty?*
Douglass: Number one, these were all Kitsap County people on the jury. We didn't try to knock off people in Kitsap County who, of course, are all involved either directly or indirectly in the Navy base. We didn't try to block any of those people from the jury. And they found us not guilty! How did that happen?
Well, one of the jurors testified at our forum after the trial. She said, "We just had to find a way to find you not guilty because it was obvious that you weren't doing anything wrong." Then she said, "I suggested a way."

Spirit: *I wish more jurors would find a way. So how did she explain the jury's plan to find you not guilty?*
Douglass: This was a woman who had her home right by the Hood Canal. She said, "One day, the oysters in the water at the edge of my property were being taken from my property by some people who came along the water and took the oysters on the beach area that I owned."

She called the police and told them that people were trespassing but the police ignored this. She said, "I told the jury: 'I called the police about trespass on my property and they did nothing. Now they're trying to put these people in jail for trespassing on federal property — which is all our property. That's not fair.' "

The jury agreed with her. And they found us not guilty.

Spirit: *Do you trace that back to the depth of dialogue that Ground Zero established with naval base workers?*
Douglass: We were living in that community. We were living in Kitsap County, Washington. Why? Because in our former residence, we were coming from the outside and then saying to the people on the inside (of the base), "This is wrong."

Thomas Merton said we cannot engage in nonviolent transformation from the outside. It is impossible. You have to be on the inside. He meant that in two senses: within ourselves personally, and communally.

In the communal sense, we had to live in Kitsap County to truly engage in dialogue with any of those people. So we're not only passing out leaflets. We're living in the community of people we're trying to engage in dialogue. They're living all around us. We were part of the community.

Spirit: *What was that like for you on a personal level?*
Douglass: Our son was the person we worried about most in this process because when we moved down in 1978, Tom was seven years old. So what about Tom? We're moving down there to be practitioners of nonviolence in ways that we can maybe deal with better; but he's going to be in the midst of a school in which all the other students are the sons and daughters of Trident sub workers in the Navy or Trident sub people in the civilian population.

So when Tom was going to his soccer games, we would cheer on the sidelines with — who? All the Navy people! [laughing] And when we went to a library meeting, all the parents in the library meeting were naval base people.

Thanks to Tom, we were parts of the community in ways that we wouldn't have been if we didn't have a child in school. And through the providence of God, the teachers that he had in that school system, all the way up until high school, were, one after another, remarkably supportive of him and his parents.

At the very end of that process, on the graduation day of his high school, we came into the auditorium with all the Buddhist monks in their yellow robes, immediately identifying themselves as the people who were sounding their drums for peace outside the base as we were blocking trains. And, of course, Shelley and I were identified as being very visible people at Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Change.

At that graduation ceremony, the graduating class stood up and sang their chosen graduation song, which was "Imagine" by John Lennon.

Spirit: *Wow! They chose a peace anthem for their graduation?*
Douglass: It was the greatest peace anthem I could have IMAGINED them to sing at that moment. The students chose that song. Some of them, including our son, had chosen to identify themselves as conscientious objectors.

Acts of Resistance and the Works of Mercy
Part 3 of the Street Spirit Interviews
By Terry Messman – July 9, 2015 --
www.TheStreetSpirit.org

The Street Spirit interview with Jim Douglass, Part 3: Strangely enough, acts of resistance to the White Train's deadly cargo of terribly destructive nuclear weapons created a community dedicated to peace all along the route of a Holocaust train.

The White Train transported nuclear weapons to military bases across the nation. Photo by Chris Guenzler

Street Spirit: *The White Train campaign mobilized people in hundreds of far-flung communities to stand in nonviolent resistance along the tracks where nuclear weapons were transported. How did the White Train campaign get started?*
Jim Douglass: Well, the White Train campaign began as the Tracks campaign at a time when we didn't yet know there was a White Train. Shelley and I had been looking at a house for years next to the Trident base as a location that was analogous to the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action, which was itself a piece of land 3.8 acres in size alongside the Trident base that we had bought as a community.

At another location alongside the fence surrounding the base, there was a house over the tracks leading into the Trident base. We thought that if we lived in that house, we would have our eyes opened to what was going into the base. To use Archbishop Hunthausen's analogy, it would be a little bit like having a house alongside the tracks leading into the Auschwitz concentration camp.

So I knocked on the door of that house periodically for several years, asking the people who owned the house if they wanted to rent or sell it. They always said no, but eventually the house was empty and we found they were selling the home. With the help of friends, we bought the house.

Spirit: *Knock and it shall be opened.*
Douglass: That's the statement of Jesus that we were inspired by. So we then lived in the house that had originally belonged to the stationmaster of a railroad yard that serviced the Trident base. You literally had to cross the tracks to get into our house; there was no other access to it.

So we then began to call together people who lived alongside the tracks near the Hercules propellant plant in Utah which regularly makes shipments to the Trident base of the highly volatile fuel propellant for the Trident missiles.

We began monitoring those shipments. We would see them a couple times a week. So we began the tracks campaign around those shipments, with people between Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Trident submarine base near Seattle. We held a retreat for people along the railroad tracks in the summer of 1981. That was the beginning of the tracks campaign.

'THE TRAIN OUT OF HELL'

Spirit: *Soon people were conducting vigils all along the railroad tracks. How long did it take before you discovered that nuclear warheads were being shipped on the White Train?*
Douglass: In December 1981, we saw the first White Train come in. We were warned by a reporter that he had seen such a train north of Seattle. He said he had a feeling that it had something to do with the Trident base, because it "looked like the train out of hell."

It was a heavily armored, all-white train. Several cars on the train had turrets on them where Department of Energy guards could put guns through slits to defend the train.

The reporter thought, "This is carrying big-time weapons." So he called us and asked if we'd ever seen it. And we said, no. So when I received the call from that reporter, I went outside our house and a White Train was coming down the tracks! I took pictures of the cars of the train.

Then we did our research and discovered that the assembly point of all nuclear weapons was at the Pantex plant in Amarillo, Texas. With the help of train buffs, we identified all the routes between Amarillo and the Bangor Naval Base, and then waited for the train to come out of the Bangor base, and then followed the train with the help of people at key junctions back to the Pantex plant and confirmed that it did come from that location in Amarillo, Texas. So that was the beginning of the White Train campaign.

Spirit: *So the first step of the White Train campaign involved researching the train routes and exposing the shipments of nuclear warheads. What was the second step of the campaign?*
Douglass: Next, we mapped out more of the routes. Again it required train buffs. Tom Rawson, who was a wonderful peace-and-justice singer in Seattle and who also had been a follower of trains all his adult life, suddenly became a great asset in our work on the White Train.

We mapped out all the possible routes to the Trident base, and then we contacted people in all of those cities and began filling in the gaps. In the course of the tracks campaign, which continued through the 1980s, we had connections with people in over 250 towns and cities along the routes of the train.

And thanks to a woman named Hedy Sawadsky, a wonderful Mennonite friend, we had a watcher in Amarillo, Texas. She moved to live in Amarillo to watch the Pantex plant and identify the departures of the White Train. That was her contemplative/active vocation for several years.

Spirit: *So these train watchers enabled Ground Zero to get the word out about the departures of the White Train and mobilize your network for vigils?*
Douglass: Sure. It was a network and once it went into action, we could follow the train all the way and people either vigiled by the tracks or sat in front of the train. They would give early notice to the police about what they planned to do. Nobody wanted to get run over by the train.

Spirit: *The tracks campaign really flourished, with many acts of civil disobedience in dozens of cities.*
Douglass: Many, *many* acts of nonviolent civil disobedience.

Spirit: *It's kind of amazing that, with your help, the White Train built up a community of peace-loving people stretching for hundreds of miles.*
Douglass: Yes, that was the irony of the tracks campaign. The railroad tracks became a connection of community along the route of a Holocaust train. The tracks campaign went on into the late 1980s.

Spirit: *It all began with only a handful of activists and train buffs. How did it feel when it blossomed so quickly into a campaign that involved hundreds of communities all up and down the tracks?*

Many anti-nuclear activists in hundreds of towns around the nation held vigils or were arrested for blocking the White Train.

Douglass: It was an experience of hope: hope spelled "community." [laughing] From the very beginning, we called that community "the Agape community."

Spirit: *Why the Agape community?*
Douglass: Agape means "God's love." It is God. Love and truth are the primary names for God, not only in Gandhi's vocabulary, but in the vocabulary of many great religious traditions. So it was a way of realizing that love and truth in action against a threat to all life on earth as posed by our weapons and policies.

That was a great development out of the Trident campaign. The Trident campaign and the tracks campaign are really the same campaign, but the tracks gave it a whole new dimension. We're not the only bunch of people who were working in that way.

As you know well, Brian Willson and the Nuremberg Actions community were doing the same thing at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, and we were in close communications with them, and with Brian who came to visit us at Ground Zero after he had been run over by the train. [*Editor*: See "Blood on the Tracks: Brian Willson Dances in Resistance to Weapons of Mass Murder," *Street Spirit*, September 2012.]

Spirit: *What did you feel about Brian's sacrifice in losing his legs while blocking a weapons train at the Concord base?*
Douglass: He is the only person in the world, I think, who could have had that happen to him and who would smile when I said, "Brian you're the perfect person to have been run over by that train."

Because he has such courage. And he has such a complete absorption of his own experience from

Vietnam and from going through the jungles and roads of Nicaragua where he could have had his legs blown off at any time by the Contra mines. Those weapons were then blocked by Brian on the tracks of the Concord Naval Weapons Station, where they were being shipped to Nicaragua when he was run over by that train. Brian's pilgrimage is one of profound nonviolence. He continues on that journey today.

Spirit: *Brian not only smiles, he danced on the railroad tracks at Concord on the anniversary of the loss of his legs. He dances on those prosthetic legs.*
Douglass: He does indeed.

STOPPING THE TRAIN IN ITS TRACKS

Spirit: *When did you and Shelley move to Birmingham, Alabama?*
Douglass: We moved to Birmingham in September 1989. The White Trains started going to the East Coast as well as to the West Coast, first to the Charleston Naval Weapons Station and then to the Kings Bay Georgia Trident submarine base.
As the trains began going east, we felt we could help along that route. We stopped in Birmingham, Alabama, and met people who welcomed us there, so we came. But by the time we got here, a year later, the reason we moved here had ceased to exist before we arrived, unknown to us.

The tracks campaign had reached the point where the Department of Energy stopped sending the White Trains. But they didn't inform us, of course, so we were in Birmingham a fair length of time before it became obvious that they weren't sending the trains anymore.

Eventually, through the Freedom of Information Act, we had that confirmed.

Spirit: *What did you discover through the Freedom of Information Act?*
Douglass: A secret Department of Energy memorandum, dated August 6, 1985, declassified in 1990. It said the DOE could not send any more White Trains.
Why? The reason given was: "IN VIEW OF THE GROWING ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, WITH ITS APPARENT FOCUS ON THE WHITE DEATH TRAIN."

The DOE memo was typed in caps, and "WHITE DEATH TRAIN" (with no quote marks around their phrase) was their own matter-of-fact description — written on the 40th anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb.

Spirit: *So the DOE's own documents show that the White Train shipments were stopped because of the tracks campaign?*
Douglass: Sure.
Spirit: *That shows the powerful effect all those communities of resistance were having on the federal government.*
Douglass: It shows the effect we were having, but that didn't mean that we had stopped the Trident submarine. It just means that the campaign was a means by which people in hundreds of communities recognized the ways in which the arms race is present in our lives.

Spirit: *Recognized it, and then took a personal stand against the arms race.*
Douglass: Yes, and took a stand against it. We didn't succeed in "stopping" the train because that train, in terms of the nuclear arms race, kept on going.
However, we took a step as part of a larger movement. We learned that through the initiative of a young man whose parents, Glen and Karol Milner, have worked with Ground Zero for decades. Glen was arrested for blocking the White Train.

Years later, his son, Aaron, did a class paper in high school on the tracks campaign. He queried the DOE about the impact of the tracks campaign. In December 1994, Aaron received a remarkable response from Gail L. Bradshaw, the acting director of the Negotiations and Analysis Division of the Department of Energy.

"Popular movements, and even civil disobedience," Director Bradshaw wrote, "can be an alerting mechanism, causing citizens to think more seriously about an issue… A result of the nuclear disarmament movement was, often, intensified awareness and a more informed public dialogue generating a more responsive policy approach."

In other words, a U.S. government official is acknowledging here that such demonstrations may have prevented a nuclear war at a critical time.

Spirit: *I've always felt that way, Jim. Seriously. I've always believed that the massive anti-nuclear movements in the U.S. and throughout Europe helped to avoid the ultimate catastrophe at the moment in the 1980s when the arms race had escalated to an extremely dangerous level.*
Douglass: You know, it was all part of a much larger movement. And that larger movement, of which the tracks campaign was one key element, succeeded in keeping us alive during that period. So I think it was a good thing.

THE NONVIOLENT CROSS

Spirit: *Your first book, The Nonviolent Cross, is one of the most profound studies of nonviolence, peace theology and the nuclear arms race. What was your inspiration in writing The Nonviolent Cross?*
Douglass: Dorothy Day. I was introduced to Dorothy Day in spirit when I was a first-year student at Santa Clara University. A great English professor at Santa Clara, Herbert Burke, introduced our class to the story of a group of people in New York City who refused to take shelter during a Civil Defense drill.
During the drills, millions of people were going into fallout shelters with the assumption that a hydrogen bomb had fallen on New York City in the spring of 1957. Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker and members of the Living Theater went to a park instead and were sent to jail for their noncooperation.

When our class at Santa Clara University was introduced to that, we all objected to the Catholic Worker and those who non-cooperated. But I was taken by what they had done and I started reading the *Catholic Worker*newspaper and I wound up writing for it.

Spirit: *If your immediate reaction was disagreement with their protest, why were you still interested in the Catholic Worker?*
Douglass: Well, they were not only refusing to cooperate with nuclear war, they were also living out the Sermon on the Mount. It was all of a piece. What electrified me from their act of resistance to air raid drills in the park was that they were resisting preparations for a war that could destroy humanity. They were resisting it on the basis of the teachings of Jesus.
So I felt that here was an answer to a terrible question: Would the human race continue to live? Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker were saying, "Yes, through the grace of God, and through a commitment to act on the teachings of Jesus."

Spirit: *In what other ways did you feel that the Catholic Workers were living out the values of the Sermon on the Mount?*
Douglass: They fed those who needed it. They housed those who needed it. They lived according to Jesus's teachings of providence. They did the whole works. They carried out the whole vision.

Spirit: *Now, more than 50 years later, you've co-founded a Catholic Worker house with your wife Shelley Douglass. Dorothy Day has had a long, long influence on your life.*
Douglass: That is true. [laughing] Back then, I felt called to write *The Nonviolent Cross* because that was the way to respond to the awful question of nuclear war. I believed deeply that Jesus and the Catholic Worker, in our own context, and those other people who believed in nonviolence, were living out the answer.

On Good Friday/Passover, people walk for peace and disarmament from the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, a church that played a vital role in the civil rights movement, to the Trident train tracks on April 17, 1992.

GANDHI, JESUS AND NONVIOLENCE

Spirit: *How is the nonviolent cross a response to "the awful question" of nuclear war?*
Douglass: The nonviolent cross is, of course, a paradox, because a crucifixion is not nonviolent. But I had been introduced to Gandhi at Santa Clara University, and Gandhi was the way into Jesus in my book,*The Nonviolent Cross.*

Spirit: *The teachings of Gandhi have always been at the center of your books and your peace activism.*
Douglass: I was convinced that Gandhi was the greatest disciple of Jesus. And that was a wonderful truth because then I wasn't restricted by dogma. Instead, I opened up to the truth of Jesus through a Hindu who was carrying it all out without being a Christian.

Spirit: *Gandhi's vision of nonviolence comes right out of the Bhagavad Gita and The Upanishads, but it is also very close in spirit to the Sermon on the Mount.*
Douglass: That is certainly right.

Spirit: *In The Nonviolent Cross, you looked at the profound messages of spirituality and justice in such figures as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Boris Pasternak. What book would you say has inspired you the most?*
Douglass: *The Last of the Just* by André Schwarz-Bart.

Spirit: *Why was The Last of the Just so meaningful to you?*
Douglass: Because of the evil he was dealing with: the Holocaust. And the depth of the response to it from the

heart of a Jewish man — Ernie Levy in the book — who walked the path of the just person and took on the suffering of the world. For me, he became a figure like Jesus.

The Last of the Just told the story of Ernie Levy and Christianity's violence against the Jewish people as the backdrop to the Holocaust. To understand that history behind the Shoah or the Holocaust, and to understand a nonviolent response to it in the life of Ernie Levy, was just transforming for me. That book is the basis for one of the chapters in *The Nonviolent Cross*and a good part of my inspiration.

Spirit: *Who else do you draw on as inspirations on this path of nonviolence?*
Douglass: I always think of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker and Gandhi. And Martin Luther King, and Dan and Phil Berrigan, and Shelley Douglass. Another key person in my life was Thomas Merton. They have walked the talk, and embodied the vision of Jesus in word and deed.

Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker with Peter Maurin. Day created houses of hospitality for poor and homeless people and acted in nonviolent resistance to war and injustice.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

Spirit: *In what way is Shelley Douglass such a key inspiration in your life?*
Douglass: Because she knows my faults better than anyone else on earth and we're still together. And she is the person who I identify most closely with Dorothy Day. We have a house of hospitality and it's Shelley who bears the brunt of that. I'm mainly writing and researching. And there's no better writer I know than Shelley. Like Dorothy Day, she's a great writer. So she's writing and living like Dorothy Day.

Spirit: *You and Shelley have been a partnership for peace and justice for several decades. Can you describe that a little? What has been the nature of your working together all these years?*
Douglass: We've been married since 1970, so that's over 44 years now. During that time, we've been separated for about two years, from either she or I being in jail for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. I think that is a key to understanding the mutual vision we have, which is for a world in which people love one another and treat each other as we try to act toward each other. We have believed that since we were married.

We married each other by exchanging rings. No clergy were present. We committed ourselves from that time on to living out the Gospels. That's what marriage is all about for a couple of people who did then, and still do, believe in the teachings of Jesus, and also of his greatest follower, Gandhi, and of the greatest American disciple of Jesus, Dorothy Day. So put that together and that's what Shelley and I are trying to live out in the Catholic Worker movement today. We have had a Catholic Worker house since 1992.

Spirit: *What was it about the vision of the Catholic Worker that led you to form Mary's House in Birmingham, Alabama?*
Douglass: Well, Shelley in particular, who had lived in Catholic Worker houses earlier in her life, had felt called for a long time to be at the heart of a Catholic Worker community. So I was joining in that vision when we moved to Birmingham and discovered that there were no White Trains going through here.

We asked ourselves why we were in Birmingham, Alabama, and we felt it was an ideal place for a Catholic Worker because one day, at a Catholic church we were attending, the priest told us he had a problem and maybe we could help him with it. So we followed him out of the church and found that the problem happened to be a couple with four children who were driving from Florida to Washington state — the longest journey one can take across the United States. When they arrived in Birmingham, they were running out of gas and food. They had been going from church to church (seeking help) and at the church just before they came to this Catholic church, they had been turned away by an armed guard.

These people, who happened to be Native Americans, were looking for help, so we took them home with us to our little house by the tracks. They stayed with us for a couple nights as we went around town looking for resources for them — which we found were very

limited. No shelters were available for married people with children. At other shelters, the wife and husband and children would have to be split up. So that was our call to start just such a Catholic Worker house for homeless families. We have that to this day.

Spirit: *What has it been like to live in a small Catholic Worker community?*
Douglass: We actually have two houses because we moved into the house along the train tracks for a campaign that never really happened. So that residence has become more of a hermitage, a place of writing and of prayer. Then we have our house of hospitality for homeless families, which is in another part of Birmingham.

Both are in predominantly poor areas and Shelley and I go back and forth between the two. She is mainly involved in the hospitality, and I am mainly involved in research and writing. But we both do both the hospitality and writing.

DOROTHY DAY AND THE WORKS OF MERCY

Spirit: *Dorothy Day described the works of mercy as resisting war, comforting the afflicted, and giving hospitality to the hungry and homeless. From your personal experience, how would you describe the mission of the Catholic Worker?*
Douglass: The Catholic Worker vision is not to be another agency for the poor, but to live with people who are overcome by that form of oppression. Dorothy Day was inspired by a man named Peter Maurin, a French peasant who was a student of the social teachings of the Catholic Church and of the Gospels.

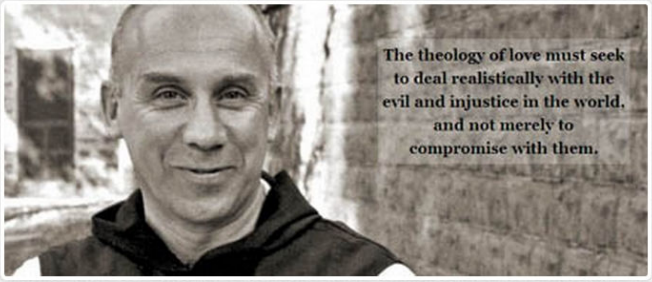
The two of them began a movement in the early 1930s which said as its bottom line: Respond to all those in need. Respond to all the evils of war and injustice in our society by taking them on. And establish houses of hospitality so that in everybody's home, there can be a place for those who need help, because these are our brothers and sisters, just as much as the immediate members of our family.

Spirit: *Many consider Dorothy Day one of the most significant figures in the history of nonviolence. What have you learned personally from her life's work?*
Douglass: Dorothy Day led that vision by being repeatedly arrested for issues ranging from the United Farmworkers to peace and nuclear war. Even before she became a Catholic Worker, she was involved in the suffragist movement for women's right to vote. She was arrested repeatedly for resisting nuclear weapons.
She spent a significant amount of time in jail. It's really a way of trying to live the vision of the Sermon on the Mount and taking it on personally. "Personalism" is the key to the Catholic Worker movement. Personalism means that a teaching of the Gospel only becomes real through our relationships to one another. So a Catholic Worker house is not only a way of caring for people. It's a way of being with people and working together in community.

Spirit: *Dorothy Day and Gandhi taught that poverty is the worst form of violence. Gandhi said that those working for justice must keep in mind the face of the poorest person they have met and ask how their actions would affect that person.*
Douglass: Poverty is at the heart of violence because the weapons that we have in our midst that now threaten to destroy the earth are means of protecting privilege. That's why they exist. And the people who are at the bottom of that pyramid of violence are all over the world, of course, and we have to seek them out.
This society and its institutions deliberately create barriers among us — like freeways that arch over the poorest areas of the country. Or people fly over those areas in planes or ignore in one way or another that form of violence. What Gandhi did, and what Dorothy Day did, was to instead live in community with people on the lowest level of society, without pretending that they could ever experience that poverty themselves.

Because whether you're Gandhi or Dorothy Day, you have immense resources that you have developed by simply responding to people in that way. Because they will join you and that gives you enormous power in solidarity and community.

Before he became the one we now identify as Gandhi, Gandhi was simply one lone individual trying to be a British lawyer. But once he identified himself with the poorest people in India, he became, in a sense, hundreds of millions of people. That's why he was giving us that teaching of his: Only if you can help the poorest person you have ever encountered by what you're doing… That was his daily way of life.



Thomas Merton had an enormous influence on the peace movement through his writings on nonviolence, the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons and racism.

RAIDS ON THE UNSPEAKABLE

Spirit: *You often cite the Trappist priest and monk Thomas Merton for his insights on contemplative prayer, war and peace, nuclear weapons, racism and nonviolence. During our blockade of the Trident submarine, you even named your boat, the "Thomas Merton."*
Douglass: I was corresponding with Thomas Merton from 1961 until his death in 1968. I also knew Merton personally because in 1965 I taught at Bellarmine College in Louisville, Kentucky, and I was visiting Merton. [*Editor*: Thomas Merton was a Trappist contemplative who lived in the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky.]

Merton had a deep influence on my understanding of nonviolence, to the point that I was hugely influenced by him in writing my book called Resistance and Contemplation. Merton put together the contemplative life with nonviolent resistance as nobody else did. Not even Dan Berrigan did it as deeply as Merton did.

Merton's books were very important. Merton's *Raids on the Unspeakable*were a series of essays he wrote in the 1960s and it forms the basis for my understanding of the assassinations of the 1960s.

In a poetic way that was deeply contemplative, Merton was exploring the unspeakable evil that included nuclear war, the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, racism and the assassinations of the 1960s. And he used the term "The Unspeakable." It's where we don't want to go, and it's what we can't even say because if we do say it, we realize the responsibility to go into a realm of resisting evil that has enormous consequences, both hopeful and traumatic.

Spirit: *Why did you write in Resistance and Contemplation that the interaction between political resistance and contemplation is so vital in nonviolent movements?*
Douglass: Well, at the time, and today as well, there was a tension between those who were resisting the war and the racism and the sexism by fairly direct and extremely active means, and those who were turning on and dropping out, especially through drugs, or through countercultural activities that didn't engage directly the oppression. Nonviolence is an integration of those two dimensions in a deeper way. Gandhi and Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton are all examples of a fusion of direct action — especially resistance to evil on a huge social scale — and prayer, with an emphasis on the contemplative side.

Spirit: *For many, the cross is a vague spiritual symbol, but the Roman Empire used the cross to execute revolutionaries. How do you understand the meaning of the cross for nonviolent movements?*
Douglass: The person I was most influenced by was Gandhi. Gandhi's great statement regarding the cross is in his Christmas sermon to British people on a boat returning to India after a conference in London. He was asked to talk about Jesus on Christmas Day.
He gave an extraordinary reflection, the heart of which is his statement, "Living Christ means a living cross. Without it, life is a living death. Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal Law of Love." I've been thinking about that ever since I first heard it.

Spirit: *What does it mean to you?*
Douglass: It means that to understand the cross as an acceptance of suffering through resistance to evil is to engage in a transformation of that evil. When I hear those words, it is just embodied by Gandhi's life. It would mean nothing apart from Gandhi. I know his story and I loved his story. I tried to understand the cross in relation to the message of Gandhi's life.
He accepts suffering in order to resist it at a level that is impossible to understand intellectually or theoretically. It has to be embodied. And embodying it means walking the same path that Dorothy Day has walked, where you live with people in poverty, and you go to jail in order to resist wars and violence of every kind, and you are prepared to give your life in order to stand with people who are being destroyed by our own government.

That was Gandhi's whole life and it's Dorothy Day's life and it's what Shelley and I aspire to as part of the Catholic Worker movement. It's the story of the early Church and it's the story of liberation movements all around the world today. Of course, they're not necessarily Christian, and Gandhi was not a Christian, but he embodied the meaning of Jesus's cross.

Gandhi's Vision of Nonviolence: Holding Firm to Truth
Part 4 of the Street Spirit Interviews
By Terry Messman – July 9, 2015 -- www.TheStreetSpirit.org

The Street Spirit Interview with Jim Douglass, Part 4: "We chose to be in the sights of the weapons of our own troops. For a few days, we were just as vulnerable as the Iraqi people. Explosions were occurring all over the city from missile attacks by our fleet in the Gulf."

During the Occupy movement, this beautiful image and quote of Gandhi was painted on a wall in San Francisco. Photo: Victorgrigas

Street Spirit: *Gandhi referred to campaigns of nonviolent resistance as "satyagraha" — holding firm to truth. What are the essential steps in building satyagraha campaigns, both in Gandhi's era and in our time?*

Jim Douglass: The most basic thing is the commitment of the people who seek to engage in such a campaign. There would have never been satyagraha campaigns in Gandhi's life if he hadn't created communities out of which they could be waged.

The ashrams in South Africa and later in India were the bases of his work. And even though the number of people living in community and taking vows of nonviolence was small, those people were totally freed to work together and to respond to the specific evils they focused on. As Gandhi always taught, you can't take on everything in the world, so you focus by identifying a social evil, as for example we did in the Trident campaign.

That's a following of truth in one's own life and then in one's community, wherever a group of people join together. We joined together in a community called Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action. Gandhi created ashrams in South Africa and India, and then out of those bases, they constructed campaigns.

The first step in a campaign is knowledge. It's research and understanding. So whether it's racism in South Africa, or a nuclear submarine base near Seattle, Washington, you study and you try to understand. In our case, it meant understanding a nuclear submarine that could destroy the world. How did we educate ourselves? Through a man named Robert Aldridge who helped design the weapon.

So you go to the sources and you understand the problem, and then you open yourself to the people on the other side of the issue. In our case, when Robert Aldridge came to support our campaign in Honolulu, Hawaii, and when we learned that his occupation was designing the Trident missile, he educated us on that — and resigned his job.

So that's the way a campaign works, across all lines. If you start denouncing the other side from day one, you're never going to hear what the perspective is from the other side. You won't learn from a Bob Aldridge what the nature of the problem is.

Then, you need to be in the heart of it. You can't deal with it from the outside, as we were doing when the Trident campaign began. Shelley and I were living in Canada. Well, the Trident base was located across from Seattle, Washington, so we moved there. As Thomas Merton teaches, and as Gandhi taught, you can't do things from the outside. You have to do it from within, both spiritually from within and communally from within.

You can't come in from liberal enclaves and go to the Kitsap County area where the Trident base is located, and hold big demonstrations, and then go back to your liberal homes and relax. You have to live with the people who are economically dependent on Trident and experience their pressures in order to disarm a submarine base that involves thousands of workers. So we moved down and found that house next to the base.

This is a step-by-step process that Gandhi lived out, and we were trying to follow in his footsteps. And then you have to accept responsibility. Rather than denouncing Trident workers for doing the wrong thing, we have to say, "We who are involved in silence and as passive witnesses to the arms build-ups in our country, we have to take responsibility for it."

So that means carrying out actions that, under international law, are necessary, but the courts send us to

jail for committing. In other words, "Walk the talk. Live the verse you're citing from Jesus or Gandhi."

Spirit: *Gandhi was already of central significance in your theology of nonviolence in your first book. Two of the most important chapters were "From Bonhoeffer to Gandhi" and "From Gandhi to Christ." Why was Gandhi such a key inspiration in the works of a Christian theologian?*

Douglass: There are two reasons that come immediately to mind as to why Gandhi is especially important to me. Number one, he is my way of understanding the life of Jesus. He is the lens through which I see Jesus, because I believe Gandhi is Jesus's greatest follower in history, bar none.

Number two, he has given all of us a way in our lives to carry out the message of Jesus and of whomever else would be in the pantheon of people we wish to follow. That method he described as his "experiments with truth."

Spirit: *Gandhi even titled his autobiography, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth." What did he mean by experiments?*

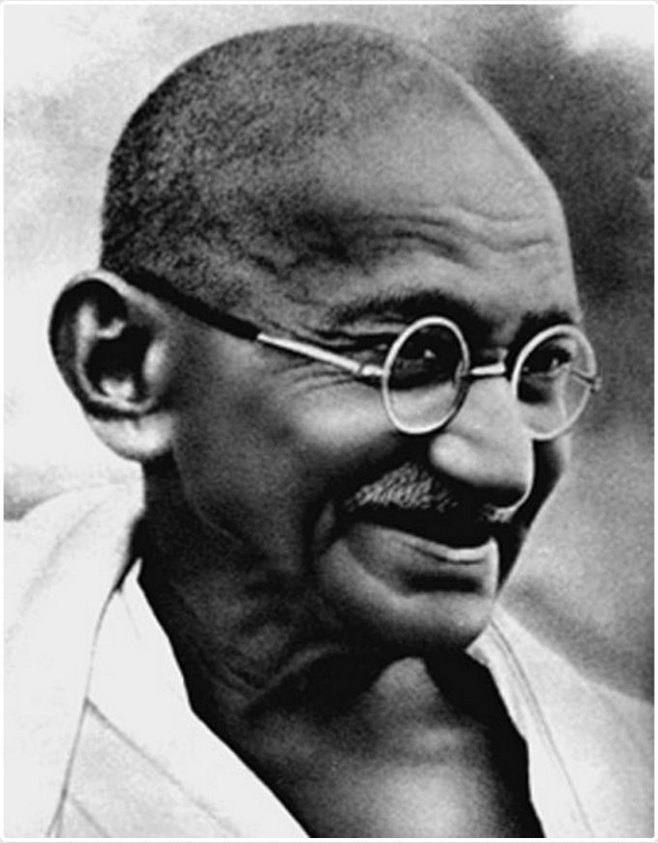
Douglass: An experiment with truth simply means doing, step by step, what one has come to believe most deeply. In other words, there is no such thing in Gandhi's understanding of truth as an abstract truth. Truth in the abstract doesn't exist as satyagraha, or truth-force. The only way it becomes satyagraha, truth-force, is if it is experimented with, and practiced in the most powerful ways that each of us can discover.

Spirit: *How did his experiments in truth lead to a vision of love and reverence for life?*

Douglass: He put truth and love as two sides of the same coin. On one side of the coin — and on one side of our being — is the process of discovering more deeply what we believe as we experiment with truth.

But on the other side of truth is the nature of this process through relationships with other people. Nobody experiments with truth as a solitary individual. We experiment with truth in our relationships with other people, each of whom is the presence of God. And those experiments have to be done if one is going to deepen in truth through nonviolence, through ahimsa, through love.

So in that process, rather than force the other person into following our truth, we must instead respect and deepen in dialogue and understanding with that other person, no matter who he or she may be, but especially if that other person considers us as enemies.



Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns were based on "truth-force."

Spirit: *Many have questioned whether nonviolence is still relevant given the vast increase in technological weapons and computerized surveillance which vastly increases the repressive power of the state. What does Gandhi have to teach us in today's world of ever more destructive weaponry?*

Douglass: He has to teach that world what another disciple of Jesus named Martin Luther King sums up in three words: nonviolence or non-existence. We need to explore with all these saints and teachers — with Gandhi and Jesus and the Buddha — the depth at the bottom of every great religion, which is the power of nonviolence, of love and of truth.

Gandhi summarized it all by saying, "Truth is God." And he put "truth" first because it is through the process of discovering the power of truth that we can understand love. Yet, on the other hand, it is only through the process of relationships that are loving that we can deepen in the truth.

Truth and love are two sides of the same coin. It is that process of seeking truth and love in a communal setting that will lead to the new world that Jesus called the reign of God, and that Gandhi called truth-force, love-force

and soul-force, and that Martin Luther King called the Beloved Community.

Spirit: *Gandhi saw nonviolence as a revolutionary force that could overthrow an empire. Yet, some criticize nonviolence as a form of pacifism — too passive to overcome powerful regimes. How do you respond to these criticisms?*

Douglass: I don't like the term "pacifism" because it immediately suggests something passive. And it's also related specifically to one issue — that of war.

I don't like the term "passive resistance," nor did Gandhi. In fact, he replaces it very specifically with the terminology of "satyagraha." There is nothing — absolutely nothing — that is passive about satyagraha.

My basic understanding of what we, in our context, always refer to as nonviolence is satyagraha, because truth force is not in any way a negative thing. It's a positive thing. It's the most powerful force in the universe, literally.

Spirit: *Why do you believe it is the most powerful force in the universe?*

Douglass: Because truth is God, and God is love. There is no force more powerful in the universe than the force of truth and love. Is that passive? It means the force that overcame the British empire in the hands of a very insignificant young man, who chose to experiment with truth.

ASSASSINATIONS AND MARTYRS

Spirit: *In writing about the assassinations of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and John and Robert Kennedy, why do you use Thomas Merton's phrase, "The Unspeakable," in referring to those political murders?*

Douglass: The process that I described as "The Unspeakable" involves killing the person in a covert way that denies the truth of even how the person is being killed in order to destroy his or her vision.

The purpose is not simply to kill that one man or woman, but it's to destroy the vision. Their vision is destroyed especially by what happens after the killing, and that's the destruction of the vision through lies, through propaganda, through the distribution of enormous cover-ups.

This second part of the process is, I believe, worse than the murder of the individual person — Gandhi or John F. Kennedy or Malcom X or Martin Luther King or Robert Kennedy. The lies about that person and about how he is killed are worse than the actual killing.

Spirit: *Why do you say the lies are worse than the assassination itself?*

Douglass: Because it is an effort to destroy that person's communal power, which is our salvation.

As Malcolm X said, two days before his assassination: "It's a time for martyrs now. And if I'm to be one, it will be in the cause of brotherhood. That's the only thing that can save this country." [*Editor*: Malcolm X said those words on Feb. 19, 1965, two days before he was murdered.]

We have to understand what these martyrs were witnessing to.

Spirit: *What were they witnessing to? And how does their martyrdom serve the cause of humanity?*

Douglass: They're witnessing to the power of God, of love, of the transformation of all of humanity. They don't die by being shot or destroyed. The power of the person is a power that goes way, way, way beyond death. Martyrdom means witness, means testimony.

The testimony of Martin Luther King didn't end on April 4, 1968, the day he was assassinated. Everybody knows that, even if we don't understand the depth of his power. And we certainly don't believe that the power of Jesus ended at the time he died on the cross.

That power of the witness to the truth and love that can save humanity does not end with that person's death. It deepens.

So the worst kind of act against truth is not the terrible act of inflicting death on the person. It's the even more terrible act of denying his or her truth — the truth of what they were dying for and how that so threatened the powers that be in their context, that the powers that be took their lives.

After his death, the government found ways to keep secret the incredible power of Martin Luther King's vision and the fact that the United States government killed him in order to destroy that vision.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE ACTIONS

Spirit: *In recent years, where have your travels taken you in seeking peace in the Middle East?*

Douglass: I've been to Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Iraq. The first trip I took to the Middle East was within a month of our arrival in Birmingham.

Spirit: *What led you to take that trip?*

Douglass: A picture in the newspaper. I was writing a book called *The Nonviolent Coming of God* and trying to understand Jesus's life and death, and I saw a picture in the Birmingham newspaper of women walking together

through the streets of a town identified as Beit Sahour, next to Bethlehem.

They all had their hands held high making the peace sign, their faces smiling. They were celebrating their resistance to the Israeli Defense Forces which had surrounded their town for a month because the members of the town refused to pay their taxes.

That town, Beit Sahour, which is the traditional site of the shepherds' field in Luke's Gospel, had become an example to people across the globe of the refusal to cooperate with their own oppression.

They said, "We do not want to pay for the weapons that kill our children." So they stopped paying taxes. I looked at that picture of these radiantly smiling women, and I thought, "What a story, coming right out of the context of where Jesus was."

Members ot the Walk for a Peaceful Future demonstrate on June 6, 1992, on Mount Carmel, above Atlit Military Prison in support of Israeli soldiers imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. Photo credit: Anna L. Snowdon

Spirit: *After seeing this photo in the newspaper, how long was it until you traveled there?*

Douglass: I learned that Scott Kennedy from the Santa Cruz Resource Center for Nonviolence was going to Beit Sahour and he asked me if I would like to come. So within a couple weeks, I was walking into Beit Sahour with Scott Kennedy and about 10 peace activists with Palestinian guides who were helping us around the Israeli blockade.

We then went to the West Bank and Gaza, smuggled into these areas by Palestinians who wanted us to see and experience what was going on.

That was my first journey into the Gospels via the analogous experience of people today in those areas. One member of our group was an American rabbi, Mike Robinson, and we met with Israeli peace leaders. We were meeting with people on both sides of the green line which divided the occupation of Palestine from the State of Israel. We met with Jewish leaders as well as Palestinian leaders in the struggle against that occupation.

Spirit: *What kind of impact did your first trip to the Middle East have on your life?*

Douglass: Well, in terms of my book, *The Nonviolent Coming of God*, it became the final chapter of the book. It was the story brought up to date of the new kind of humanity embodied by Jesus, who identified himself as "the human being."

I saw a nonviolent vision of people across borders, whether they're Jewish or Palestinian, that was envisioned actually by some of the people in Israel who saw a bi-national state, instead of this terrible division and war. We didn't have to go down the track that we did go down, which resulted in the partition of that area. That was not necessary — and is profoundly wrong.

So as a result of going repeatedly to the different countries there, I would say that a critical issue that is ignored in its larger dimension is nuclear disarmament for *all* of the countries of the Middle East. And when I say all, I mean ALL.

If one can engage in a disarmament treaty in the Middle East that will include Israel and Iran and Iraq and Syria and everybody else in that area — reflecting the commitment of the entire world, as already represented by the Non-Proliferation Treaty — then we're going to have peace across the boards. Of course, the ignored party in all of this is Israel, which has been the nuclear power in the Middle East for decades.

Spirit: *You're saying that the U.S. government keeps threatening Iran and demanding that other countries in the Middle East disarm, but doesn't say anything about nuclear disarmament to its ally Israel?*

Douglass: It's total hypocrisy for the United States, the most powerful nuclear country in the world, to threaten and impose huge sanctions on Iran when we're not obeying the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That treaty was written as a trade-off between countries that do not have nuclear weapons not to develop them and countries that do have nuclear weapons to disarm.

Spirit: *Yet the U.S. is not disarming itself and it's not asking Israel to disarm.*

Douglass: Oh, absolutely not. Israel's disarmament is key to that of Iran's and our disarmament is key to that of everyone. And that's a treaty! We're not obeying the law, in other words. We have signed a treaty saying we would do that so long as other countries didn't develop nuclear weapons. Any student of current American

history needs to know the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the terms of it — which oblige us to do what we say.

So that's the main issue. I would encourage people to understand this and to see this from the eyes of the Iraqis or the Jordanians or the Palestinians or, for that matter, the people who raise questions in Israel and who are loyal citizens of that country.

We've got to disarm the whole works, in terms of nuclear weapons, and then progressively through the whole range of weapons. And we can't do it in just one country. It has to be everybody. That's obvious to everybody except us.

Spirit: *Did you take part in nonviolent actions against the U.S. wars on Iraq?*

Douglass: Yeah, I was arrested for resisting both the Persian Gulf War in 1990 and the more recent incursion on Iraq in 2003. I was also arrested in Israel and Palestine for walking for peace repeatedly through those areas in the early 1990s. I took part in several peace walks through Israel and Palestine and into Jordan.

In all of those areas, we walked for weeks. Kathy Kelly was one of our leaders. You have interviewed Kathy for *Street Spirit* and I was following Kathy's lead. [See "Seeking Peace in a World of Imprisoned Beauty," *Street Spirit* Interview with Kathy Kelly, May 2014.]

Spirit: *Was that as part of Voices in the Wilderness?*

Douglass: No, the first time I was over there walking with Kathy, Voices hadn't been created yet. But on a later trip, I was one of the co-founders with her of Voices in the Wilderness. Shelley and I both went on trips with Kathy as part of Voices in the Wilderness. We made five trips to Iraq at different times, and I was arrested repeatedly in Palestine.

Spirit: *What were those arrests like? Civil disobedience must be a very different proposition in that war-torn region.*

Douglass: One of our nonviolent actions in Israel and Palestine was called Walk for a Peaceful Future. We walked up through northern Israel and then across into Palestine and then down through Jericho, and then across the bridge into Jordan. All the way along the walk, we were being arrested by the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces, and then taken back to Jerusalem, always with the warning: "We're going to let you out here. Stop doing this!"

Then we'd go back to the site where we were arrested and continue our walk. Finally, we were able to walk across the bridge into Jordan, but we had been arrested many times by then.

We were going to go all the way to Iraq by taking vehicles into Iraq. This was within a couple months after the Persian Gulf War. When we got to Amman, the capital of Jordan, we waited to be given visas by the Iraqi government, and they weren't coming through. So I decided to go back to Israel and I took a bus with a group of Palestinian refugees who were trying to get in to see their families on the West Bank — and I was barred from Israel! [laughing]

It was very interesting because when I came to the gate, an official was examining the documents and passports of people who wanted to go in there — including a number of Palestinians who were barred.

When he came to me, he said, "Oh, Mr. Douglass." I realized he had been my jailer in Jericho — the same man! He said, "Well, I will call Jersualem, but I don't think you're going to be allowed to go back in." He did call, and I was barred. [laughing]

But we were then given permission to go to Iraq by the Iraqi government, and I was able for the first time to visit Baghdad with Kathy and the group.

Beit Sahour, the traditional site of the shepherds' field in Luke's Gospel, is a Palestinian town that became an example to people across the globe of the refusal to cooperate with their own oppression. Photo: Iseidgeo

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Douglass: Because I did not want to cooperate any further with the process of arresting people for praying in front of the White House. [laughing] It's no reason to arrest a person in the first place, much less put them on trial.

Spirit: *Did they ever come after you for your noncooperation?*

Douglass: I was arrested years later in Birmingham for not going to the trial in Washington, D.C. A federal marshal came to my home in Birmingham and arrested me. The judge was planning to sentence me to six months in prison, and he didn't even understand civil disobedience.

Lynn McKenzie, a Catholic sister who happens to be a lawyer, took it upon herself to go to that judge and tell him what civil disobedience was all about. So they gave me one day instead of six months! I only served a weekend in the local jail for that.

Spirit: *She wasn't even acting as your lawyer? She just went to talk to the judge on her own?*

Douglass: No! She wasn't acting as my lawyer. She just contacted him, and then she did come into the courtroom. But she had already tried to explain to this man who didn't have a clue as to what was going on. He thought I was just a fugitive from justice. It was only because of that kind Benedictine sister who was a lawyer, that I didn't serve much time.

Spirit: *Well, the lesson for our readers is clear: If you ever get in trouble with the Law, call the Benedictine sisters.*

Douglass: There you go! [laughing]

The Benedictine sisters are known for many things. That was really just one act of nonviolence, compassion and understanding from a highly skilled sister.