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TESTED IN THE DESERT

A Decade of Prayer and Protest at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site

BY JOYCE HOLLYDAY

era. It was here that young soldiers kept camp and were marched onto the test site, to be intentionally exposed to above-ground nuclear tests during the 1950s.

"It was very scary to be aware of the radiation," Symens Bucher says. "I said to myself, 'I'm here, breathing this air, walking on the same earth they walked.'" She adds, "It was a life-changing experience."

On Good Friday that year, Symens-Bucher and 18 others prepared to cross over onto the test site to protest the continuing testing of nuclear weapons. She was just finishing college, and, expecting to spend at least six months in jail, had brought a backpack full of books with the intent of writing three term papers behind bars. Mike Affleck, who along with Daniel Ellsberg was among the 19 who crossed the line, remembers Ellsberg saying that he expected to get more time in jail for this action than he did for releasing the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War.

The sheriff's deputies, under the direction of Capt. Jim Merlino, treated the protesters gently. In a Beatty, Nevada courthouse, Judge Bill Sullivan refused to put them in jail, stating, "I basically agree with you," according to Symens-Bucher.

These people of peace were following footsteps through the desert that had been laid down 25 years before. On August 6, 1957, the 12th anniversary of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, a number of protesters including A.J. Muste, Ammon Hennacy, and Larry Scott made a witness there. According to Franciscan Sister Rosemary Lynch, these early protesters camped in tents by the test site and "during an above-ground test walked toward the mush-

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