Saying Goodbye to a loving Heart

Mira Leslie, 1955-2017

By the Ground Zero Community

Our dear friend and colleague Mira Leslie died on March 10 surrounded by the embrace of a loving community.

Mira knew she was on limited time after being diagnosed with brain cancer, and chose to continue being out in the world working to make it a better place. Just days before her death Mira participated in the Pacific Life Community gathering and the monthly Ground Zero Stewardship Council meeting, building the fire and working on the grounds, providing, as always, energy and support for the work at hand.

Mira participated in peace walks with the Nipponzan Myohoji from Bangor, Washington to Bangor, Maine. She took the lead for Ground Zero in the permitting process for a peace pagoda at Ground Zero Center. She not only paddled with the Peace Fleet and helped plan last summer’s Boats by Bangor, but also was a kayaktivist with Seattle 350 and the Shell No campaigns.

Mira brought her understanding of mindfulness, peace, and justice to her work with the Freedom Project at the Monroe Reformatory and to the streets of Seattle. She was a regular at the Tuesday vigils at the Federal Building and at Lake Forest Park for Peace gatherings.

A peace keeper at Ground Zero actions, Mira was also a vital part of the Washington Peace Team, bringing her vest, smile and grace to events ranging from the Anacortes oil
refineries protests to Standing Rock demonstrations.

Mira was active with Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Pacific Life Community, participating in the planning of both groups’ 2017 annual gatherings. She took her peacemaking to JeJu Island, the School of the Americas, Standing Rock, Japan and Okinawa.

This past December Mira traveled to Hiroshima to acknowledge the terrible horror of the US atomic bombings on Japan in August 1945.

Mira had an unquenchable lifelong thirst for peace and justice, and her friends at Ground Zero Center will remember her “as an inspiration in many ways—an Activist’s activist.” “Time with Mira was always full of heart. She has touched so many of us with her loving heart.” “Mira’s spirit and soul are genuine in her wish to realize a peaceful world.” She left a hole in our lives, but left us with “passion, love and strength.”

PLC Members Engage in Direct Action at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, Invoke Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen

By Elizabeth Murray

A large contingent of Pacific Life Community (PLC) members braved slippery, muddy conditions on the cold, rainy morning of March 7 to march from Ground Zero Center to the Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor main gate to share their message of peace, nonviolence and opposition to nuclear weapons with the base employees. The Bangor base hosts the largest operational concentration of warheads in the United States, and covers over 7,000 acres on the shores of Hood Canal, in Puget Sound.

It was the culmination of a three-day retreat at the Pilgrim Firs camp in Port Orchard, WA — filled with the community and fellowship of many longtime anti-nuclear and antiwar activists — sprinkled with the inspiring presence of several newcomers under 30! — who came together to refresh their spirits and renew their commitment to community and faith-based nonviolent action.

This year’s theme, “The Passion of Resistance,” drew inspiration from the life and example of former Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, who played a leading role in many nuclear weapons resistance actions at Bangor during the 1980’s, and who was eventually ousted from his position by the Vatican for his outspokenness against nuclear weapons, advocacy of war tax resistance, as well as a litany of other courageous but politically incorrect acts of conscience. Hunthausen, now retired and in his late nineties, lives in a retirement home in Helena, Montana and was unable to join in this year’s retreat.

The solemn procession of approximately 40 PLC’ers to the gates of Bangor was accompanied by the steady drumbeat and chanting of “Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo” by Senji Kanaeda, the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist monk from Bainbridge Island, who regularly supports nuclear resistance efforts with his peaceful, spiritual and nonviolent presence. Participants held up signs proclaiming “Abolish Nuclear Weapons” and “Our Children Deserve Better: while peacekeepers in bright orange vests ensured participants were safe from oncoming traffic.

Ahead of the direct action, participants gathered in a circle on the shoulder of the road for a short ecumenical service in which they broke bread and invoked former Archbishop Hunthausen, who famously described the Bangor-based Trident nuclear submarine system as “the Auschwitz of Puget Sound.”
Trident Warhead Now Deadlier Than Ever

By Leonard Eiger

Experts at the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (The Bulletin) recently blew the lid off what the US government has euphemistically called its “Life Extension Program” for the W76 thermonuclear warhead deployed on the Trident II D5 submarine-launched ballistic missile.

The article, “How US nuclear force modernization is undermining strategic stability: The burst-height compensating super-fuze,” authored by Hans M. Kristensen, Matthew McKinzie, and Theodore A. Postol, shows how the US military, under the guise of what it calls a “life-extension program” – allegedly intended to increase safety and reliability of nuclear warheads – has vastly increased the ability of warheads to detonate closer to their intended targets.

The heart of the rebuilt W76 and its increased kill capacity is the new MC4700 arming, fuzing, and firing system. This new system essentially gives the W76 capabilities it never had before; that is, the capability to hit hardened targets – specifically Russian ICBM silos – with three times greater accuracy than before.

The authors (in addition to detailed technical descriptions) explain this new capability in clear lay terms: “Before the invention of this new fuzing mechanism, even the most accurate ballistic missile warheads might not detonate close enough to targets hardened against nuclear attack to destroy them. But the new super-fuze is designed to destroy fixed targets by detonating above and around a target in a much more effective way. Warheads that would otherwise overfly a target and land too far away will now, because of the new fuzing system, detonate above the target.”

Steven Starr, a senior scientist at Physicians for Social Responsibility and an expert on the climatic consequences of nuclear war, called the report “the most frightening article I have ever read in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.” Starr has good reason for concern, as should we. This article exposes the US government’s continuing pursuit of nuclear dominance over Russia.

The following sentence summarizes that concern, which is centered on the Trident nuclear weapon system: “A decade ago, only about 20 percent of US submarine warheads had hard-target kill capability; today they all do.” This statement refers to the fact that the 100 kiloton W76 warhead previously did not have the capability, due to its relative lack of accuracy, of getting close enough to destroy “hard” targets such as Russian ICBM silos.

Because of the new super-fuze, essentially 100 percent of the warheads currently deployed on D5 missiles now have this capability to hit hard targets. This capability was previously reserved for the Minuteman III ICBMs and the relatively small number of W88 (455 kiloton) warheads also used on the D5 missile.

The implications of the development of the super-fuze and its use on the W76 are existential! Whatever the intentions of Pentagon planners, this development is most certainly sending a message to Russia that the US is building a significant first strike capability. As the article says, “by shifting the capability to submarines that can move to missile launch positions much closer to their targets than land-based missiles [and with the addition of the new super-fuze], the US military has achieved a significantly greater capacity to conduct a surprise first strike against Russian ICBM silos.”

And this would be only the opening salvo of a first strike attack. The remaining 80 percent of US ballistic missile warheads would likely be used to destroy mobile missile launchers, hardened command centers and other military and (potentially) civilian targets.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the OHIO Class “Trident” ballistic missile submarines have become the central, and most important, element in the US nuclear triad. Based on the New START treaty signed in 2010, roughly 70 percent of the US’s nuclear warheads will be deployed on Trident submarines. Trident has the ability to move undetected while on its deterrent patrols, and can be stationed in strategic locations in the North Atlantic where its missiles...
“Trident Three” have upcoming discussion and trial

By Bernie Meyer

The “Trident Three,” Brother Gilberto Perez, Bernie Meyer, and Larry Kerschner (pictured below left to right), will present a discussion about their arrest during an action on Mother’s Day 2016 and on the implications of the current US Nuclear Weapons Policy. The presentation will take place on Thursday, April 6, at 6:30pm, at St. Leo’s Church, 710 South 13th St. Tacoma, in the Bill Bichsel Hall.

Additionally, all are invited to a gathering of support just prior to their trial on Wednesday, April 12, from 12:30 to 1:30pm at the Federal Courthouse in Tacoma (located at 1717 Pacific Ave.).

The Trident Three provided these statements about their actions:

Bernie Meyer: “We are at a juncture, a juncture that we created, that is of our own doing. We created nuclear weapons, nuclear power, a whole system of radiation dispersal. We created a way of life that spews carbon dioxide, methane, and more chemicals into the atmosphere which circulates into the oceans and onto the continents and heats them up beyond our accustomed tolerance. What do we do? What will you do?”

Brother Gilberto Perez: “A moral consciousness is needed in realizing love and compassion for all. The revolution of the heart melts away the walls of hate, and war. We must love each other, or nuclear annihilation is inevitable. We are not alone.”

Larry Kerschner: “Twenty miles west of Seattle is the largest concentration of deployed nuclear weapons in the US. It is clear that the actual use of nuclear weapons would grossly violate the international laws of humanitarian armed conflict under any conceivable circumstances. How can the US threaten the use of nuclear weapons without violating international law? The Nuremberg Principles absolutely proscribe crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. How can the US Government lawfully establish a threat to commit such heinous offenses?”

Bernie Meyer, Br. Gilberto Perez, and Larry Kerschner were arrested by military police after crossing the blue line at the Bangor base in May 2016.

Call to Action on Earth Day!

By Michael “Firefly” Siptroth

The Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action and allies are organizing an Earth Day Action on Friday April 21, in Seattle, and urge you and all your friends and associates to participate! Please widely share the enclosed flier.

We will gather at Westlake Park at 11:00 am where prayer, drumming, singing, and speakers will engage us. Make your own creative poster to connect respect for our Earth with no more spending on Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the message Abolish Nuclear Weapons! We will demand our tax money be spent on healing the Earth, green jobs, clean water, air, land, energy, housing, transportation, healthcare, education, settling refugees, sustainable agriculture, nature/wildlife protection, parks, and saving wild places!

We will proceed to the Federal Building where we will continue the rally while a delegation meets with Senators Cantwell and Murray and/or their staffs. The delegations will let them know we want them to take leadership on supporting the United Nations in its efforts to abolish nuclear weapons, and to take congressional actions to limit any accidental or first strike capability. Above all, no new nukes, and abolish nuclear weapons worldwide!

We need people to go on social media, write letters to the editor, our congressional representatives, and to get the word out! We also need people to hold banners and be peacekeepers.

Please contact me at flybill2@aol.com or call 360-275-8441 to offer help. Marianne Mabbitt and Mona Lee have been working tirelessly with me for months on this effort and I thank them; we want it to be a big success!

Towards peace, justice for all, deep respect for our Earth. Abolish Nuclear Weapons!

Michael “Firefly” Siptroth lives in Belfair and has been a key member of planning committees for several actions. He serves in an at-large position on the Stewardship Committee.
never stopping for a million years
Yong Wang, Dragon King of the sea
breathed the tide twice daily
across the solid volcanic rim
hardened like glass
between the land and the sea
after the winter snows
spring rains become
rivulets running down the sides
of Halla-san
flowing beneath the fragrant tangerine trees
across and under the kilometer of gray Gureombi rock
here and there fresh-water springs appear
medicine from the ancestors
shapeless water rejoins a shapeless sea
here is something that is true
completely without understanding
but with bitterness in their mouths
in their delusion
that they must be in control
that control requires a shattering
dark forces only think they have crushed
the heart of Gureombi
with their rock smashing machines
moving in a robotic rhythm
inhuman slow dance to the imperial tune
those who say resistance is futile
have no understanding of the heart
look down from Halla-san
see the Island of the Gods
the Island of Peace

If You Want Peace, Don’t Pay for War
From The Catholic Radical

Kathy Boylan of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, DC, sent Ground Zero the following statement from The Catholic Radical newsletter. The call to resist war taxes appears especially timely in light of the new president’s plan to hike the defense budget by 10 percent.

“We refuse to pay for war! Nearly half of the federal income tax is funding endless war and war preparations. In good conscience, we will not pay this war tax. Some of us live below a taxable income. Many of us who are taxable have chosen to redirect our refused taxes to organizations that provide for basic human needs. To explore this form of conscientious objection, please contact the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee at www.nwtrcc.org or (800) 269-7464—for information, literature, counseling, and guidance.”

[There are too many signatories to list here; but they include Greg Boertje-Obed, Roy Bourgeois, Kathy Boylan, Frida Berrigan, Susan Crane, Jim & Shelley Douglass, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit Archdiocese), David & Jan Hartsough, Martha Hennessy, Fr. Steve Kelly, Kathy Kelly, Cindy Kramer, Paki Wieland, and many others.]

The message will be published in many media publications this month. To add your name, contact Daniel Sicken at dhsicken@yahoo.com

Larry Kerschner is a poet, activist, and Veteran for Peace.
Thirteen PLC’ers were cited and released for their resistance actions at the main entrance gate—but not before they stretched banners across the roadway declaring: “Abolish Nuclear Weapons” and “War Is Immoral,” symbolically closing the base entrance in an affirmation of the illegitimacy and illegality of nuclear weapons.

Ticketed and released for “pedestrian leaving the curb” were Kelsey Chalmers of the LA Catholic Worker, Susan Crane of the Redwood City Catholic Worker, Ed Ehmk and Mary Jane Parrine of Menlo Park, CA; journalist Allison McGilvray and partner Sam Yergler; and Nick and Mary Mele of Bellingham, WA. Six others crossed the “blue line” into federal property, reading aloud passages of the Nuremberg Principles before being arrested by military police. They were Alexandra Addresso and Karan Found-Benton of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker; Fr. Steve Kelly, SJ from the Oakland and Redwood City Catholic Worker Houses; Betsy Lamb of Bend, OR, and Charley Smith of the Catholic Worker in Eugene, OR.

Banner-holders on the state side of the “blue line” were able to sustain their presence on the road for a lengthy period—approximately 10 minutes—until Washington State Patrol officials arrived, allowing their message of nonviolent resistance to be taken in by a greater-than-usual number of base employees, many of whom slowed down while exiting to read the signs and observe the scene.

Highlights of the weekend included a presentation by Dave Hall and Mack Johnson entitled “Preventing Nuclear War: There’s No Cure,” summarizing the physical impact of dropping an 800-kiloton hydrogen bomb on New York City and explaining the dangerous overkill of the US military’s nuclear capability. A link to the full presentation can be accessed at the Pacific Life Community website, https://pacificlifecommunity.wordpress.com.

Also, three longtime nuclear resisters who have done more than their share of prison time — Plowshares activists Susan Crane and Father Steve Kelly, SJ from the Redwood City and Oakland Catholic Workers; and Dennis Apel of the Guadalupe Catholic Worker — shared their personal insights on discernment, the process of evaluating whether/how/why to undertake a resistance action — which generally includes factors such as the impact of an action on family, friends, and loved ones.

Dennis Apel, who recently emerged from a four-month prison sentence for a nuclear resistance action in front of Vandenberg Air Force Base, aired a video of his two children, who described the family’s collective discernment process, the personal impact their father’s incarceration had on their lives, and how they managed to cope in his absence. Dennis, who at one point was placed in the Special Housing Unit, SHU (another name for solitary confinement), for refusing to stop writing accounts of his prison experience in the Santa Barbara Independent, eventually relented so he could exit the SHU. He explained that he agreed to do this because of the adverse impact that his enforced isolation was having on his son. In explaining part of her own discernment process before an action, Susan Crane recommended listing advantages and disadvantages of a action to help with decision-making, while Fr. Steve Kelly — when asked how he had managed to survive long periods of solitary confinement — simply said that he adopts the mentality of a monk.

Other highlights of the retreat included a presentation by Sisters Kathleen Pruitt and Chauncey Boyle of Seattle on Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen’s precedent-setting advocacy of war tax resistance, nuclear resistance, and the progressive, inclusive values that continue to permeate Seattle’s Catholic community as a direct result of his living example; a screening of the new John Pilger documentary “The Coming War on China,” resistance songs led by local guitarist/singer James Morgan, and an exercise in which participants talked about what gives them hope in a time of social and political turmoil. Participants shared their thoughts with one another, then posted them on paper leaves making up a “Tree of Hope.” Finally, this year’s PLC was honored on March 6th by the presence and participation of Ground Zero member Mira Leslie, who joined our Cloud of Witnesses on March 10. Mira, a tireless and dedicated peace activist, accompanied the Nipponzan Myohoji monks on numerous Peace Walk journeys over the years; visited Standing Rock to express her solidarity with the Water Protectors; and helped organize many kayak-based actions in Seattle related to the climate, energy and anti-nuclear movements. Mira graced everyone at this year’s PLC with her beautiful smile and warm spirit. As PLC co-organizer Sue Ablao stated: “She was so happy to feel good enough to come to PLC. It was important to her. She was at peace with her terminal cancer diagnosis and prepared for the next step in her journey. It just came sooner than she expected. She will be missed.”

Ground Zero community members George Rodkey, Sue Ablao and Elizabeth Murray organized this year’s Pacific Life Community retreat.

Elizabeth Murray serves as Member-in-Residence at Ground Zero. In 2016, she participated in a citizens’ peace delegation to Russia.
would have a very short flight time to Russian targets.

The D5 missile can carry up to eight warheads. Under New START, the D5s carry an average of only four to five warheads. If New Start were to fail, which is becoming an increasing possibility with the current deterioration in relations between the US and Russia, the US could choose to fully load the D5s. In that case, based on the estimates in the article, two fully loaded Tridents (with 192 warheads each) could easily destroy all 136 Russian silo-based ICBMs.

The Russians have most certainly been keeping a close eye on US nuclear weapons developments. They have also been closely watching the US military’s fascination with ballistic missile defense, which the Pentagon touts as purely “defensive,” but which Russia rightly perceives as the US seeking nuclear dominance.

Aside from the other current US nuclear weapons developments, the development of the W76 warhead super-fuze will likely be perceived by Russia as the most threatening. This is in large part due to Russia having no satellite early warning system, and relying instead on ground-based radars. Because they are far less sophisticated than US radar systems, the Russians have “less than half as much early-warning time” (15 minutes or less) in the event of a suspected US nuclear attack.

As the authors state, “The combination of this lack of Russian situational awareness, dangerously short warning times, high-readiness alert postures, and the increasing US strike capacity has created a deeply destabilizing and dangerous strategic nuclear situation. When viewed in the alarming context of deteriorating political relations between Russia and the West, and the threats and counter-threats that are now becoming the norm for both sides in this evolving standoff, it may well be that the danger of an accident leading to nuclear war is as high now as it was in periods of peak crisis during the Cold War.”

Both human and mechanical errors are inevitable in any system, and with nuclear weapons there is no margin for error. Accidents have occurred throughout the nuclear age, and more than one has involved false radar warnings. In 1995 a Russian early warning radar system mistakenly identified a scientific rocket launch from Norway as a submarine-launched (Trident) missile. Only at the last minute did officials realize that they were not under attack.

The end of the Cold War brought with it a historic opportunity for the US to begin serious negotiations with Russia leading to nuclear disarmament. Instead, our nation continued to pursue nuclear dominance, and as a result, over 25 years later we are entering into what is unarguably a new Cold War with Russia.

Trident is now three times more deadly than ever before. The US is rapidly moving toward production of a new ballistic missile submarine fleet that will be even more sophisticated than its predecessor. The twelve submarines of the Columbia Class (that will replace the OHIO Class) are being built to sail well into the end of this century. Along with the new submarines, the Navy is already seeking a new missile to replace the Trident II D5.

How long can we go building newer and more sophisticated (and deadly) nuclear weapon systems before they end up being used either accidentally or intentionally? How long can we play this dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship before something snaps? How can our nations’ leaders, in good conscience, continue to put humanity at risk of nuclear extinction?

The Bulletin article ends by quoting Russian President Putin speaking in 2016 about how he perceives (and how Russia will respond to) the West’s offensive military posture. “No matter what we said to our American partners [to curb the production of weaponry], they refused to cooperate with us, they rejected our offers, and continue to do their own thing... I don’t know how this is all going to end. What I do know is that we will need to defend ourselves.”

If the US is serious about reducing the risk of starting a nuclear holocaust, the President will have to begin repairing diplomatic relations with Russia. A critical first step would be for President Trump to take all nuclear weapons, including submarine-launched ballistic missiles, off hair-trigger alert. This would demonstrate to the Russians that we have no intention of using our nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive first strike, and would greatly reduce the risk of accidental launch of nuclear weapons and the resulting nuclear war.

The newly emerging nuclear arms race is a dangerous game that nobody can win; ultimately humanity will be the loser. The nuclear powers are addicted to the myth of nuclear deterrence and are driven to continue their insane pursuit of nuclear dominance. It is up to us as citizens to speak out in mass numbers calling on our governments to turn back from the brink and seek a path toward disarmament. Nothing less is acceptable.


Leonard Eiger chairs the Communication and Outreach Committee, and sends out press releases and information on behalf of Ground Zero.
“
If we can connect in some tiny way with a human that doesn’t agree with us, then maybe we won’t blow up the planet.”

— Nancy White

Speakers, Musical Performances, Fellowship, and Resistance as Ground Zero Commemorates Mother’s Day on May 13

By Edward Digilio

“I will write peace on your wings and you will fly all over the world.”

— Sadako Sasaki, age 12, victim of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

On Saturday, May 13, in honor of Mother’s Day and our children, the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action plans to hold a “For the Kids” direct action at the gate of Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor in protest of the Trident nuclear weapons system. Please join us as we symbolically shut the gate to the Trident doomsday machine.

Activities begin at 9:00am at the Ground Zero Center. Our featured keynote speaker at this year’s Mother’s Day action is Plowshares activist Susan Crane, who will share recollections from a lifetime of resistance to nuclear weapons. Additional event highlights include musical guests the Seattle Peace Chorus Action Ensemble, as well as a potluck lunch. Please bring a favorite dish to share with your fellow activists.

We hope to see you at the protest! For a schedule of the day’s events and more information, please visit our website at www.gzcenter.org.

Edward Digilio serves on the Planning Committee for the Mother’s Day events. Leonard Eiger took the photo above at the 2014 Mother’s Day action.