

CARRIE DANN

Crescent Valley, Nevada

An Interview by

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Nuclear Technology in the American West Oral History Project

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SAMANTHA SENDA-COOK INTERVIEWED CARRIE DANN ON AUGUST 19, 2007 IN CRESCENT VALLEY NEVADA.

SS: So, I'm Samantha SendA-Cook. It is August nineteenth, around twelve fifteen. I'm in Crescent Valley, Nevada; and I'm interviewing Carrie Dann. Could you say your full name, and spell it?

CD: Carrie Dann, C-A-R-R-I-E D-A-N-N.

SS: And what is your current residence?

CD: I live out there at the old homestead.

SS: OK. And how long have you lived there?

CD: All my life.

SS: And is that? How old are you?

(Both laugh)

SS: I'm gonna ask your birthday, anyway. If you don't want to answer, you don't have to.

CD: Well, I'm not gonna give you that.

SS: Oh, no. OK. Alright, moving on: What... how would you categorize your occupation?

CD: My occupation? My occupation, at one time, was a livestock raiser, and now my occupation is old age.

(Both chuckle)

SS: OK.

(Carrie Dann laughs.)

SS: Alright, so birthplace and birthdate; do you want to tell me that?

CD: I was born out to the old homestead, and I'm not gonna give you my birth-date, so.

SS: OK.

CD: It was in the nineteen thirties.

SS: OK.

CD: That, well, I will tell you.

SS: Alright. And then, do you have siblings?

CD: I've got two.

SS: OK. And you've lived here your whole life. Why have you not moved? Or, do you feel connection?

CD: Why should I? This is my home.

SS: OK, and then let's see. What was your family life, growing up, like?

CD: Just a regular kid. Doing some bad things, and doing some good, you know. Just a regular kid I was just average.

SS: All right. Who were your roll models, growing up?

CD: I don't know if I had a roll model or not.

SS: Anybody that you looked up to? Wanted to be like?

CD: Nope.

SS: OK. What were some of your guiding ethical principles?

CD: My guiding ethical principles?

SS: Yeah. How did you learn what were good ethics and what were bad ethics?

CD: These were from what were handed down to our people through the generations.

And we were also given the same kind of instructions that they had. And we just—very strict, you know. Being trustworthy...

SS: Um-hmm.

CD: Being very respectful, not only to humans but to all life, and to be honest with each other, and we were told that if we showed disrespect towards others that means that we are— we have no respect for ourselves so, we're brought up very strictly with traditional way of life.

SS: Um-hmm. You have a... would you call yourself an activist or an advocate?

CD: I don't know. You categorize me, probably as an activist...

SS: Um-hmm.

CD: Recently. First I was a stock raiser, you know. I was in livestock, but now I'm full time activist. I guess I've been an activist since, you know, the Nevada Test Site¹ days, 'cus you know, used to go down and protest with Nevada Peace Site, uh, Peace Test.

SS: Um-hmm. And so what made you want to do that?

CD: It's wrong.

SS: What is?

CD: Nuclear weapons, nuclear waste. It's wrong. Our stories talk about, you know, how different things will affect you. And if that comes from a rock, a rock has told us, you know, what to—how to treat a rock. And if we don't treat a rock in a respectful way, you know, you can destroy.

SS: Um-hmm.

CD: So, you know.

SS: Yeah. What nuclear waste or just nuclear protest issues have you been involved with?

¹ The Nevada Test Site is located in Nevada. It was the home to over 1000 nuclear weapons tests conducted by the U.S. federal government.

CD: I've been involved with the nuclear testing, down at the [Nevada] Test Site. Little bit, not too much on the nuclear waste, but you know, the [Western Shoshone] National Council is more involved with test—you know the, the nuclear waste, as far as organizations go. And personally, I'm against nuclear waste and its, as I said at the beginning you know, if you get something and it's destructive it's not right. And instead of burying it underground, I think that man had better learn how to neutralize that nuclear energy that's being stored down there, and if they can't neutralize it then I would say just leave it alone.

SS: When did you first get involved? You said during the nuclear testing. How did you first hear about protests happening, or what made you start to go down there? When did you hear about it?

CD: I don't know when I heard about it. I suppose we've heard about it for a long time before we went down there. I know in the fifties they tried to convince us civilized people, or you know, the citizenry, of how good nuclear things was, especially, you know how good nuclear power was to generate electricity and all of that kind of stuff. It was advertised as being really, really great stuff. Nobody ever heard about the destruction it can do. Nobody ever heard about those dead sheep on the nuclear testing down there. I mean those are the things that, that was kept a secret. I mean, I, I don't think that's right. I think that people should have known what nuclear can do and what nuclear waste can do and to this day, you know, people are kinda kept in the dark about, you know, the destruction it can cause.

SS: And so when you would protest, what would you do?

CD: Some of us would get up and talk, and some of us would march and some of us would, you know, just hold up banners and whatever to show our dis—you know, we don't want it basically.

SS: Um-hmm.

CD: What can you do? You know the government is on one side, and this is ordinary people on this other side you know. And many times we were called unpatriotic, but then I don't think that was unpatriotic. I think we were more patriotic than those that called us unpatriotic.

SS: Were there any particular people or any events that piqued your interest in this issue?

CD: What do you mean by particular people?

SS: Somebody who maybe told you about what was happening, or you saw be affected by this directly and made you want to get involved?

CD: Well if you know anything about the nuclear, you know, the nuclear testing certainly you know that it's all over. It's in the newspapers. It's where ever you look you know. In the, you know, if you're interested in, in what's happening in your world you know you gotta just look at things and see what happens. And if you don't like what's happening, then you do your part to act against it.

SS: You also have quite a bit of back-ground in sovereignty issues and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how that has impacted your life, or how you first became involved with that struggle as well.

CD: I was born into that struggle. It's not that you know... We have our own history which talks about, you know, the agreement between the United States and the Western Shoshones, and I do believe it's called the Treaty of Ruby Valley. And I do believe that

the Constitution of the United States also says that it is a supreme law of the land and so therefore the indigenous people, the Shoshones in this area they've always said, at least the historically minded people have always said, that a treaty is a treaty between two nations and the only way you can ever make changes is when the two nations again come together. Now that's their interpretation, of course that is my interpretation too, because that's what they said. That's the history that was given to us on the indigenous side. Now you look at it on the side of the so-called civilized people, which is you know United States of America, it too should act in that way, and generally in most cases it does; all except for with indigenous peoples.

SS: And then, so what has the nature of your struggle been?

CD: Well, for one thing that a—my struggle has been, you know, to make some kind of a livelihood for, for myself my family and of course you know our people. When I first got involved in it I used to hear attorneys that supposedly represented us. I say supposedly, allegedly, whatever, represented the Shoshone people and used to tell us that the treaty was not a treaty at all. It gave away land instead of, you know, preserving land. Now, that's according to a man that's supposed to represent one—the tribal groups, and—which to me, is a darned outright lie. I could see the injustice that was being done by him. The injustice was telling people lies, to represent them. And we, some of us, had real bad arguments with these attorneys and I don't think that's—as an attorney to represent you, I don't think he should be out there misrepresenting his clients. In my opinion he misrepresented us and that land. Some of that land, and especially Yucca Mountain, that's in the Western Shoshone area. That's on our lands and as a Western Shoshone people we don't want it [nuclear waste]. It is against, you know, what the rock has told

us: in the future that is not to be used in the way that it is being used. So we are opposed to it on the, you know, upon the hist... from the creation story part of, of it and we are opposed to it because of the destruction it can do in case of something malfunctioning or something went wrong. So, we are opposed to it on two different areas.

SS: How would you describe your role in the nuclear waste debate?

CD: Say that again.

SS: How would you describe your role in the nuclear waste debate, or this debate over where to store nuclear waste?

CD: I don't think there should be nuclear waste and there would be no reason to discuss or debate over nuclear waste because there shouldn't be any. If man can't control it, man should not bother with it. Man should be respectful and, you know, not only to himself but also to the future generations; not only to the one with two legs, but the future generation of wildlife that lives here on this earth.

SS: And then have been involved in protesting this issue at all, or...

CD: I have to some extent.

SS: So, what have you done, in that area?

CD: What have I done in that area? I've told you I wasn't really, you know... Corbin Harney used to be the one to take care of all that stuff for us and he's been gone what goin'on two years, goin'on this is first complete year that he's been gone. And so we really miss him because, we, you know, actually the protesting the nuclear dump and nuclear waste has been kinda at a standstill. The [Western Shoshone] National Council is doing a little bit of something about it, but not enough [pause] not enough.

SS: What do you think maybe should be done about it?

CD: I think they should close it down.

SS: Yucca Mountain? What about nuclear power plants as well? You mean the whole industry?

CD: Well, you know what causes... Why do you have to have nuclear power plants?

SS: Because, I guess the rationale is that we need more power.

CD: Why?

SS: Because we are consuming power at an unsustainable rate.

CD: Well you just said the word 'unsustainable rate.' Then that rate must be made sustainable. Otherwise, you know man's gonna eat up the earth and the earth isn't gonna last very long because you're demanding too much from the earth or you're over-demanding from it now, as it is. You know, people should stop and think what they're doing.

SS: Has the Western Shoshone Defense Project been involved in nuclear issues lately or... like you said that was mainly Corbin Harney and so they haven't been doing much with it for the past year or so?

CD: Oh, we are gonna get involved a heck of a lot more than what we have been doing, you know.

SS: And so what are the future plans?

CD: We're gonna have a meeting on September the twelfth

ZD [Zachary Davies from Western Shoshone Defense Project observed the interview]:
Twelfth or the nineteenth.

CD: and we are gonna talk about what the [Western Shoshone] Defense Project will be doing.

SS: Um-hmm, so stay tuned for more information?

CD: (laughs) Yeah.

SS: What are some local issues that you think, I guess demand, our attention in terms of nuclear waste disposal?

CD: The local issues? Well they were talking about locally to run the rail between that little town Beowawe [Nevada] down to the [Nevada] Test Site, right through there. They talked about all of these things. Yes, we, we attended those meetings. They had a couple of them here in Crescent Valley, and I...Of course, we didn't want it. We still don't want it. And I wouldn't want it to be on anybody's back door or front door because you know if something went wrong, you know... But then in a way it might be, it might be a blessing because if you're right close to it you die immediately but, if you're further away, you—it takes longer for you to die and you can suffer a lot. You might have terminal cancer or you can have all these terminal diseases, which would make you suffer and the worst part is, you know, kids today have cancer they don't know from what. You know, if they would just be honest with themselves and say the nuclear stuff could be the cause of this cancer in young people—[pause] old people as well.

SS: Let's see.

(both laugh)

SS: Everybody. Let's see. Who do you think has been or will be affected by nuclear development, nuclear testing, and nuclear waste disposal?

CD: Nobody.

SS: Nobody?

CD: Nobody.

SS: Can you explain that?

CD: What was the question again?

SS: Who will be affected by nuclear waste testing, development, and disposal?

CD: Oh, Everybody! Everybody, yeah.

SS: OK.

CD: Everybody will be affected by it.

SS: And do you see any particular communities being affected disproportionately affected?

CD: I suppose those that's closer will be affected more than those that's further away.

Like I said, you know, you're closer you die faster than those that's further they have more suffering.

SS: Um-hmm. Let's see. How close is this to your home?

CD: The actual [Nevada] Test Site, as a crow flies or as, as on the road?

SS: Both? Do you know both off the top of your head?

CD: No, I don't

(both laugh)

SS: So, so you pick.

CD: I, I would estimate probably as the crow flies from anywhere from two-hundred fifty miles to three hundred miles from here.

SS: Um-hmm, and then that would also be Yucca Mountain.

CD: Well that's what I'm talking about, Yucca Mountain.

SS: Yeah, OK.

CD: The Test Site is probably about, more close to about six hundred miles, or...

SS: OK.

CD: ...five hundred and something, anyway.

SS: Um-hmm, and let's see. Do you think that this issue is particularly important in your life?

CD: I think it is pretty particularly important in—it should be important in the lives of every anybody that have children and grandchildren because they're the ones that's gonna be affected. And they're the ones that you want to protect as being indigenous persons. We are by our own ways supposed to be—watch out—watchful for the seventh generation. Not just us but the seventh generation you know and that's how many years, hundred and forty years. And, you know... It makes us not live within our rules, you know our in—the rules that was handed down to us. It makes us break those rules because America doesn't think in those terms. And if people start thinking in those terms and think about the little ones that's still in the ground that hasn't been born yet, you know, they gotta do something. They should do something.

SS: And so, whenever you talk about... I guess maybe at these speeches that you're talking about and protests, do you bring up this kind of seventh generation logic?

CD: Oh yes.

SS: Yeah, and explain what that means and...

CD: Um-hmm.

SS: OK. Who do you think is generally not considered in debates about nuclear waste and its disposal?

CD: Probably the indigenous peoples.

SS: And why not?

CD: I don't know. I guess it's the way the politicians and, you know, the general public looks at us. You know, in general, let me say this: Of all the people in the world... They say the constitution is indigenous, comes from indigenous laws, with you know a few changes here and there, and yet, we cannot use these laws to protect our rights. America has been found guilty by Organization of the American States, also known as OAS, and the United Nations under what?

ZD: It's the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

CD: Yeah, Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, also referred to as CERD as being very discriminatory towards us. They denied us the equality of law. They denied us our own property and they have, you know, they've acted against us and that's the reason why. We can't even have a court system. Going to a court system where we are, no matter how right we are they will rule against us simply because I think because most courts of the United States are racist. I—that's my feelings you know. I have to be honest with, with you and myself. Right now we have a, in a court system, our rights to Mt. Denabo over here, which is, you know, the buried gold mine is mining at Mt. what they call Tenabo, which to us is called Denabo and its a very special place; not only that area, but also the surrounding areas around it. Those things go back to the time of the memory of men, you know; way, way far back before there was even humans on this earth. It goes that far back. Our creation stories tells us that. And we look at, you know what ever lives up there, there's all kinds of life up there. Every tree, every blade of grass, they have a spirit. They have a life and to us it's not right for—to wantonly kill this type of spirit that's there. In our traditional ways we also have spirit things up there like a little whoever. Whoever's up there, they're spiritual. They're probably more spiritual than a lot

of Christian people, and a lot of people that walks on this earth. Because they're true to whatever, you know, what was given to them. But we also see, you know, that these little spirits are also living in fear because it's all kinds of noises. It's... They don't have that freedom they're supposed to have. I'm sure that, you know, the nuclear industry when they blast those bombs and when they're digging that that whatever they gonna bury, the nuclear waste at, the spirits down there are scared, maybe ran away from there. Who knows? I mean, I see disrespect towards the spiritual life of other things, well just even the spiritual life of people, but everything has a spiritual life. And that is being disrespected by supposedly the most intelligent of all life on earth. And I don't call that intelligence. I call that the most disrespectful because they disrespect the life that's out there. After all, when you look at this earth, this earth is a mother to life not only to the human life, but to all life. And if you don't understand that you know, just look at what you've got. Look at your glasses. Look at your frames. Look at your earrings. Look at your clothing. Where does it come from?

SS: The earth.

CD: The earth. Everything that we have comes from the earth and yet today we see extractive industry especially hurting the earth. To us, the earth is very much alive to indigenous people. To traditional indigenous people, the earth is alive. It's a mother to all life, and if people can't understand that I don't know when they're gonna understand it, if they ever will understand it. Because if something happens to this earth... They're talking about global warming, you know, you see the sign of it right over here. Thirty days its been hot, hot, hot, hot. Thirty days if it's been hot, hot, hot, hot up in Alaska and north you will see the ice melting but there's no ice over here. So you don't see the melting ice

but you feel it. It's hot, hot, hot. Come on people. Mr. and Mrs. America, wake up and take your children with you because it is their future, you know, they should be considering.

SS: Um-hmm. You distinguished between indigenous people and traditional indigenous people what did you mean by that.

CD: Traditional indigenous people still follow the old faith. You know like the spirit life and things like that. A lot of our indigenous people no longer practice that. But the traditional ones are—still practice that. They still believe in that.

SS: I see. Do you see the, I guess, the spiritual world that you were talking about connects lots of environmental issues or environmental problems that are happening such as mining, or nuclear waste development and disposal, or global warming?

CD: It all has. They all have effect on this earth, every one of them. Let's take your body for example: in our ways a female's body is modeled after the earth. She can reproduce. Before formula, she can be the only one to make that life live because she's got the breasts to feed that life. And so a woman is—the earth is a female. We are—as of the earth, we are females too because we can give life and we can nourish life up to a time when the children grows up. They wean themselves from their human mother and they turn to their earthly mother. And she will take care of them the rest of their life. And when they are dead and gone she will cradle them.

SS: And so, I guess just like nuclear issues affect the earth they also affect ourselves and our bodies. Is what you're saying?

CD: That's right.

SS: Let's see. Who's responsible for the nuclear waste situation that's happening now?

CD: What do you mean who's responsible?

SS: Are there particular people or entities that you think...

CD: Politicians, I suppose.

SS: OK.

CD: And politicians and corporations that's making money down there left and right, you know, like Bechtel. There's other companies I'm sure that's involved. And, I mean, they control the lobbyists in [Washington] D.C. They control a lot of these things and once you control the lobbyists in [Washington] D.C. you've got control of the so-called representatives from the states. Here in this case for the nuclear waste maybe for the state of Nevada, oh whatever state they're from, you know.

SS: And then, do you see these people taking responsibility for the situation?

CD: I think...I'm not a politician and up in the society to give you an answer on that.

SS: Hmm.

CD: But a lot of times, you know I, I do believe that the political parties either, you know, for their, their candidates give them 'yes' or 'no' and its all tied to politics and of course money. You know.

SS: Is there anything else you'd like to add that I haven't asked about?

CD: Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?

(Both laugh)

SS: Let's see, I'm sure the people have lots of questions and so, I don't know. Can I have a follow-up interview?

(Both laugh)

SS: If necessary, that's, that would be the final question I guess.

CD: I would like to let the people know, as an indigenous traditional persons, we believe in the sacredness of the land, the air, the water, and the sun. These are the most important things in the lives of traditional people because they all represent life. If there's no sun, there'll be no life. If there's no air, there'll be no life. There's no water, there'll be no life, and no land no life you know. I wish people would, you know, stop and look at the sacredness of all these things, and I wish that, you know, people would really learn to respect these. Not only these, but also themselves as well. You know, right now what we have in today's society anything that's out there is worthless as long as it doesn't—you don't get money for it. It has to be valued in dollars and cents with—before anything is worth anything to the Western civilized world. That's my opinion. Now it's maybe not a fact but it, it is an opinion and a very strong opinion at that. Because, you know, if you can't make money off of it, it's not worth anything. They will destroy things for the sake of making money off of whatever kind of project they have. And I guess I am mostly, you know, looking at the extractive industries, like mining and also petroleum, and all that kind of stuff you know simply because they're drilling inside the earth and they're hurting the mother, hurting the earth. And in traditional ways that—you know, it its very hurtful, what they're doing. Not only is it hurtful, but it's harmful. It's harmful. Maybe you may not see the effects of it right now, but how about the future generation? How's it going to affect them? So you know, people gotta think, you know, what's gonna affect the future generations? Do you have children?

SS: Hm-mmm.

CD: You planning on getting married, and having a child or two?

SS: Hm-mmm.

CD: You never run into the right guy yet.

(both laugh)

SS: Maybe not. I wanted to ask you; you said that Western civilization is driven by how much something is worth. Do your activist efforts, as a response to that, or something that you try to resist?

CD: Actually, I would love to live without having to have to have money to buy this and to buy that, to you know... They're trying to teach the whole world, you know, people out in the Amazon, people in, you know, what they call tribes yet. Only thing they're trying to teach them is to learn how to carry arms and also learn how to make money. And money to me is something that is very false. There's many people in this world that don't have money, many people, and yet they survive. How do they survive?

SS: I'm not sure. Do you know?

CD: No, I don't. But here we used to survive on whatever is out there on the land. Today, we don't have that out there on the land... I remember my mother and my dad, when they came home one time and she says, "We were went riding up there." And she said, "We saw the last of the" what they call "the lettuce" the indigenous lettuce, just one left. And there was sheep up there and she said "After they're gone they'll be gone." Yeah?

SS: Alright. That was my last follow-up question. [laughs]

CD: Anybody else got a question?

SS: Yeah, might as well. Alright. Thank you very much.

CD: Thank you.