

# Disarmament Specialists Sentenced



Photo by Bonnie Urfer

**Sisters Ardeth Platte (L), Jackie Hudson (C) and Carol Gilbert (R) give their sentencing statements outside of the federal courthouse in Denver, Colo., on July 25.**

By Susan Crane

On July 25, 2003, Dominican Sisters Carol Gilbert, Ardeth Platte and Jackie Hudson were sentenced in Federal Court in Denver, Colo., for exposing a weapon of mass destruction right here in the USA. On October 6th of 2002, wearing white mop-up suits with "Citizen Weapons Inspection Team" written on the back and "Disarmament Specialists" on the front, the sisters went to N-8, a Minuteman missile silo in northeast Colorado, poured their blood on the cover of the silo in the shape of a cross, hammered on the silo, and opened the fence up so that the public could inspect the weapon of mass destruction they had found.



Photo by Bonnie Urfer

**Hundreds of nuclear weapons abolitionists gathered for vigils at 49 silos in Colorado and additional silos in Montana and Wyoming after the Dominican Sisters were sentenced in Denver the previous day. Silo N-8 was the scene of the nuns' symbolic disarmament action for which they were imprisoned.**

On the morning of their sentencing, the sisters wore black to be in solidarity with the Women in Black, an international movement of women who stand in silent protest of war and wear black as a symbol of mourning. They gave their sentencing statements, which are usually given in court, in front of the courthouse to a gathering of press and over 300 supporters. Judge Robert Blackburn had not allowed international law or any affirmative defense during the trial. Consequently, the sisters wanted to speak to people who would listen, not to the judge in the courtroom.

The lawyers for the sisters argued that there should be downward departures for acceptance of responsibility. The judge did not grant this, but did give the sisters two downward points for their community service and support, which he said was local, regional, national and international. People who worked in support and sent letters to the judge should know that their efforts made a real difference.

The judge then dropped 6 points for mitigating circumstances — they didn't aid a foreign government, no real harm was done to the national defense, and their action caused no substantial risk of injury or death.

Judge Robert Blackburn imposed sentences: 41 months for Ardeth, 33 months for Carol, 30 months for Jackie. Restitution: \$3,080.04; Special Assessment: \$200; Supervised Release: three years.

Outside the court, we reflected that the sisters should not be in prison for their action. The trial was a railroad, they were guilty neither of Sabotage nor Felony Destruction. The work of the sisters didn't cause damage over \$1,000. And yet, in this country, which is criminally detaining people, criminally destroying the earth, criminally using radioactive weapons, which is the largest bully on the earth, maybe we all should be in prison.

The next day, people went to all 49 silos in Colorado to vigil against the weapons of mass destruction. There were many creative actions at the silos.

Jackie's family, religious from Colorado, and other close friends and supporters went to N-8, the silo that the nuns had begun to convert. We tied banners to the silo fence, and then prayed the liturgy that the nuns used during their action.

Steve Kelly, S.J., offered the Eucharist. There was a healthy tension because we went, uninvited, inside the farmer's fence right up to the silo.

Later, in Stoneham, Colorado, people from most of the 49 silos gathered for celebration, and for the hope of further actions that would lead to the silos being shut down.

#### From Sentencing Statements:

"We know something is very wrong with a system that can incarcerate us for years in prison for inspecting, exposing and symbolically disarming America's Weapons of Mass Destruction.

"We should be acquitted for upholding international laws which this court has deemed unnecessary but which it is bound to enforce under Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution.

"I don't fear going to prison. I don't fear loss of freedom to move about. I don't even fear death. The fear that fills me is not having lived hard enough, deep enough and sweet enough with whatever gifts God has given me."

—Sr. Carol Gilbert, OP

"Well, today is the day. It holds many unknowns as regards the judgments/decisions of Judge Blackburn. Yet it holds many knowns: the continued presence of nuclear weapons — latest figures list the U.S. ownership at 10,455 and a



Photo by Bonnie Urfer

Sara Thomsen performed at the May 2003 "Cultivate Peace" gathering at the Project ELF site in northern Wisconsin.

## Sara Thomsen: Keepin' the Peace

The latest compact disk from Minnesota singer/songwriter Sara Thomsen, *By Breath*, includes an insightful and ironic reflection on the nature of nuclear weapons. "Keepin' the Peace" presents a beautifully simple breakdown of the disarmament actions taken against the ELF/Trident system by Bonnie Urfer and Michael Sprong in June 2000, and by Donna Howard and Tom Hastings in April 1996.

Thomsen's style and vocalization are warm and inviting, holistic and inventive. As the title cut says, "The fire in my heart, my soul flame burning / Is the fire in your heart, your soul flame burning / We are Spirit burning bright, by the light of day, in the dark of night / We are shining like the sun, and like the moon, like the Holy One / By breath, by blood, by body, by spirit, We are all one."

The liner notes with the CD include an explanation of the ELF submarine system and generously acknowledge Nukewatch as the contact for more information.

Thomsen's *By Breath* is available from Common Place Music, 2323 County Road 6, Barnum, MN 55707. For more information: <commonplacemusic@hotmail.com>; www.sarathomsen.com

## NUKEWATCH PATHFINDER

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