

ALSO BY COLMAN MCCARTHY

Disturbers of the Peace

Inner Companions

Pleasures of the Game

Involvements: One Journalist's Place in the World

*All of
One Peace*

ESSAYS ON NONVIOLENCE

COLMAN McCARTHY



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London

Sixth paperback printing, 2003

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McCarthy, Colman.

All of one peace : essays on nonviolence / Colman McCarthy.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8135-2096-7 (cloth)—ISBN 0-8135-2097-5 (pbk.)

1. Nonviolence. 2. Pacifism. 3. Peace. I. Title.

HM278.M34 1994

303.6'1—dc20

93-45521

CIP

British Cataloging-in-Publication information available

Copyright © 1994 by Colman McCarthy

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

The essays in this collection originally appeared in the *Washington Post*, with the exception of "Study War No More," which appeared in *The Progressive*, and "Why We Must Teach Peace," which appeared in *Educational Leadership*. We gratefully acknowledge the permission of the publishers to reprint them here.

*For Alice Russell Deegan,
a woman of courage and generosity,
and
Sarge and Eunice Shriver,
grace-filled peacemakers and stalwart friends*

*The Class of
Nonviolence*

Q. Why are we violent but not illiterate?

A. Because we were taught to read.

—David Allan

Aside from the happiness of the loving companionship of my wife and our three sons, my next constant source of personal joy has been the students who have taken my courses on non-violence. These five pieces are about some of them, and about the courses. I have been amazed—stunned, really—at the eagerness with which my students have opened their minds and hearts to the study of nonviolence.

Many of the more than three thousand young women and men I've taught since 1982 are from violent backgrounds. Some were raised in dysfunctional families torn by physical or psychological abuse. Others had figured out that we live under a dysfunctional government that squanders our money on violent military programs to deal with other dysfunctional armed governments.

I agree with Woodrow Wilson, who argued, during his Princeton years, "The purpose of education is to make the young as unlike their elders as possible." With most of the elders of the Earthian tribe given over, or resigned to, the ethic of violence, helping a few kids to be unlike them is among the reasons I'm in a high-school class every morning at 7:30. It's also why my wife and I began the Center for Teaching Peace in 1982. It's a non-profit organization that counsels schools, teachers, and administrators on how to begin or expand courses on nonviolence. We've raised about \$600,000 and have funded programs in Washington; East St. Louis; Chicago; Salisbury, Maryland; Eugene, Oregon; a state prison in Virginia, as well as a home study correspondence course.

This is small, compared with the immensity of the need. All of us feel overwhelmed by the world's violence. Who isn't

frustrated by the seeming lack of progress? There's an old Irish saying—and it usually is—"Don't worry about being successful, worry about being faithful." I may be expecting too much, but if my students can grasp and absorb that in a brief semester, it's a truth they are likely always to keep.

Some of my favorite students, I'm delighted to confess, are the skeptics, especially so when they are politically conservative. In the mid-1980s—the evil empire days, you'll recall—I had a student who cherished Ronald Reagan, backed Star Wars, and wanted more money for the Contras. He suffered through my course, as can be imagined. During the last moments of the final class of the semester, with students leaving and farewells being offered all around, my conservative skeptic pulled me aside and said he'd like to make a deal. Tell you what, he announced: After fifteen weeks of studying nonviolence and hearing you proclaim its marvels, I pledge that I'll embrace the philosophy of pacifism on the day the Soviet Union falls without a world war.

I'm not sure where that student is these days, but I'd not be shocked to hear he's running a craft shop in Vermont.

November 28, 1986

STUDY WAR NO MORE

Like tattooing on the body of education, Bill Tisherman, the student in the front row of my class, had fine markings. He had majored in English at Harvard. He wrote, read, and savored poetry. In class he spoke in sentences and could gem them with jeweled insights that brightened the discussions. Among classmates, he had personal warmth and was immediately likeable.

Tisherman is now a graduate student at American University in Washington and, through some chancy turn, ended up last summer taking my course, "Peace and World Order." It went for \$800 for fourteen two-and-a-half-hour classes—pay up and show up and earn three credits. The numbers were of little

interest to Tisherman, who saw them as useless externals. He was introspective, trying to understand the interior life. He was beginning to figure out, too, that even if you win the rat race you're still a rat.

Near the end of the course, Tisherman wrote a paper. It dropped the guises and disguises to which his Harvard education and much else entitled him. He confessed to being "surprised at the degree to which my attitudes and behavior have been molded in ignorance and guided by assumptions."

With reportorial skills not usually found in poets, he cited specifics. Before taking the course, he wrote, "I had never heard of Dorothy Day. I thought of Joan Baez as a singer, Martin Luther King as a black leader, and Thomas Merton as a monk. I believed that both humans and animals are violent by nature. . . . I never doubted that education is the product of lectures and assignments, requirements and grades."

Among the five hundred students I have had in nine courses in the past six semesters, most came into the first class "molded by ignorance and guided by assumptions." Why shouldn't they? I was teaching peace-studies courses and the students had been exquisitely educated in violence studies.

In grammar school and high school, they had been exposed to the glories of Caesar's wars, Napoleon's wars, America's Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, and the global preparation for World War III. The schools masterfully taught them the militarists: George Washington, Robert E. Lee, U. S. Grant, Davy Crockett, Cromwell, Pershing, Churchill, Eisenhower, Custer, and Patton. They studied Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Lexington and Concord, Iwo Jima, and the Alamo. If SAT scores were based on high-schoolers' knowledge of violence and war, we would have a nation of young geniuses.

Emerging from that, how could a student like Bill Tisherman be expected to know about Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement? She is not mentioned, much less taught or studied, in grade schools or high schools. How can the young know about Gandhi, King, Rankin, Muste, Merton, Addams,

Jesus, Dolci, Giovanni Bernadone, Ballou, Mayer, Schweitzer, Einstein, the Berrigans, Abdul Ghaffer Kahn, Nearing, Lithuli, Baez, Tolstoy, Camara, Sharp, Sandperl, Sibley, Penn, Fox, Woolman, or Pérez-Esquivel?

These, and dozens of others, believed that the force of nonviolence is more effective, more ethical, and more teachable than the force of fists, guns, armies, and nuclear weapons. But eighteen-year-olds come into college knowing more about the Marine Corps than the Peace Corps, more about the Bataan death march than Gandhi's salt march, more about organized hate than organized cooperation.

We call them well-educated and keep the delusion alive by making sure that higher education lowers them deeper into the acceptable sludge of violence studies. Then they are ready to go docilely into a world that spends more than \$800 billion a year on wars or war preparation—a sum that comes out to \$2.2 billion a day, \$91 million an hour, \$1.5 million a minute, and \$25,000 a second. In 1976, the total was \$300 billion; now, that sum is spent by one nation alone, the United States.

Since 1900, according to Ruth Sivard in the 1985 edition of *World Military and Social Expenditures*, wars have killed 78 million human beings, a 500 percent increase over the previous century. Some fifty governments are currently waging declared or undeclared wars, putting down rebellions, or otherwise carrying on hostilities that claimed an average of 41,000 human lives a month in 1985.

Nonmilitary wars add to the toll. Handguns used in street or household shootouts account for about 10,000 deaths a year in the United States. In one recent year, 8.4 percent of the nation's homicides were committed by one spouse against the other. Two million Americans are beaten by their spouses every year, and another 1.7 million are attacked with knives and guns. Some 5,000 suicides are recorded annually among Americans under the age of twenty-five. Abortions account for some 1.5 million deaths of fetuses. Every day, 15 million mammals, fowl, and fish are killed to supply food for America's flesh-eaters.

In the Third World, the violence of neglect is pandemic. Some

38,000 children die every day of diseases that could be prevented by timely vaccinations. Treatment would cost \$10 per child. The Congressional Research Office reports that since 1977, U.S. development and food aid to Third World nations has decreased by 16 percent in constant dollars while military assistance has increased by 53 percent. In a sermon at Riverside Church in New York City a few days before his death in April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., said we are "a society gone mad on war." His own government, King concluded, was "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."

As a journalist, I have been reporting, lamenting, and damning the killing and the schemes for killing since 1956, when I wrote in my college newspaper—and in my bluntest freshman prose—that the people who enrolled in campus ROTC were fools and the people who ran it were jerks. I remember that I tingled when I wrote that, and I admit it's still a charge to let go with an adjectival blast at today's crop of jerks and fools issuing the orders to spend the annual \$800 billion death budget.

But after the tingles and charges, what?

To get beyond the negativity of mere griping, I decided to try teaching peace. Criticizing the way of violence is hollow unless we can offer alternatives.

I learned early that peace can't be taught, any more than grace can be taught to a dancer or style to a writer. All one can do in a peace-studies course is to help students develop a philosophy of force. Nothing more than that is at work in the world: Governments, institutions, and individuals seek to control, reform, or persuade other governments, institutions, and individuals by means of force. Only two kinds of force—violent and nonviolent—are available, and both have failed. It's left to us to determine which kind of failure has been worse and which kind of force we want to risk.

Those who prefer violent force, as when a government sends its army to change the behavior of another government that has an army of its own to say that its behavior needs no changing, must justify the deaths of this century's seventy-eight million war victims. Is that success? Those who choose the force of the

handgun as the best way to control, reform, or persuade the next person need to talk to the ten thousand people who will be shot and killed in the next year.

From the other side, the believers in nonviolent force have their own explaining to do. If Jesus, Gandhi, and King were peacemakers, why are so few of their followers committed to the creed? Why is it, as Gandhi asked, that "the only people on Earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians"? If Jeannette Rankin, the member of Congress from Montana who voted against entry into World Wars I and II, was so effective, why was she defeated in the next elections after her votes for nonviolence?

If we are faced with a choice between two failures, we are obliged to study—systematically, wholly, and devoutly—which failure, violence or nonviolence, is the better risk.

At American University in Washington, D.C., I hired on to teach two courses—"Peace and World Order" and "The Politics of Nonviolence." Both were designed to create the intellectual and emotional conditions that would permit students to develop their own philosophy of force. The choices, whether collectively as citizens of a nation or as individuals, are not between war and peace but between war-force and peace-force. The ideas I offered were both as old as the hills and as new as the paths we keep cutting up them to rise above the world's sea of blood.

With a weekly class length of two and a half hours, a sumptuous spread of time, we could write, read aloud, discuss, and debate. In the first semester, only fifteen students signed on. By its end, word was out that a course on nonviolence had somehow slipped into the curriculum. Fifty people enrolled the next semester. I was asked to split the classes and take two sections of twenty-five students each. This meant teaching from 5:30 to 8:00 P.M. and then from 8:10 to 10:40 every Wednesday. I run in marathons, I thought; why not teach in them? Then the unexpected happened: Hearing that the course now had two sections, another fifty students asked if I would take them in. All are welcome, I said; it's your \$800.

The growth was to continue. In the fall of 1985, after a sum-

mer class of fifty-five, I taught one course with 140 students and another, in the School of International Service, with ninety. The student newspaper reported that some two hundred were turned away by department administrators.

I supply these enrollment details because they refute the media's portrayal of today's college students as mere careerists. I discovered the opposite. They think about their futures—who doesn't?—but they are also heart-weary of wars, violence, and the cheerleaders for wars and violence. They will jump at a chance to study the alternatives.

A fourteen-week course on "Peace and World Order" can include the basic texts as well as the obscure ones. I spent a few moments of the first session explaining the two philosophies of force in the world. For an in-class writing assignment, I asked everyone to compose his or her own obituary. It's an easy way for a teacher to get acquainted with the class and a sure way to learn how students feel about their life and values.

Often I was able to persuade activists and theorists to share an evening with us. These included two Salvadoran refugees; Ed Guinan, who founded the Community for Creative Nonviolence; Senator John Melcher, who spoke on Food for Peace; Marion McCartney, a nurse-midwife who described her experiences in nonviolent deliveries; Joan Baez; Mitch Snyder; Garry Davis, the saint of the world-government movement; John Shiel, the most jailed and unrepentant pacifist in the United States; Representative Andy Jacobs; a Vietnam veteran who teaches peace studies to black high-school students; Marlow Boyer, who was dying of cancer at the age of twenty-five and spoke of his pending death; a Mexican archbishop, and four survivors of the Hiroshima A-bomb.

My other course, "The Politics of Nonviolence," also had a structure of fourteen classes, guests, and selected readings by such writers as Thoreau and Dwight Macdonald, Albert Einstein and Gandhi, Daniel Berrigan and A. J. Muste. Topics included Biblical pacifism, military conscription, world government, pacifism and the women's movement, war-tax resistance, and the military rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Each course provided time for in-class writing. In many college courses, the writing is impersonal, the research dull, and the conclusions tame; I invited my students to free themselves of their customary please-the-professor style and use their writing in my class as an opportunity for energetic opinionating, personal expression of feelings, and visceral reactions to what we had read. In this pressure-free atmosphere a fair number of students noticeably improved their writing skills.

Gandhi believed in experiments in truth. For one semester, I experimented with a third course, which I called "Peace, Justice, and Governments." Again, class material was easily harvested. The fourteen topics included Albert Schweitzer and the reverence for life, the World Peace Tax Fund, peaceful alternatives to the violence of abortion, Scott and Helen Nearing, nonviolent birth and home delivery, solutions to economic violence (E. F. Schumacher), the Peace Corps, Danilo Dolci, the Sanctuary movement, pacifism and Vietnam veterans, Erasmus, William Penn and precolonial pacifism, Mother Teresa, and nonviolent and noncoercive education (Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori, and John Holt).

I relished the breadth of these courses. The more I taught, the wider the field of study became. I had assembled material for forty-two classes, but each topic itself could be expanded into one course for an entire semester. Many topics—from early Christian pacifism to tax resistance and world government—could be studied for two semesters.

For a reading list, I offered a selection of books that included the best and least known works on nonviolence. When students asked how many of the books they should read, I told them to start with one and see how far their imaginations would take them. The list, like the subject, is for a lifetime, not a semester. For some students, one paragraph from one book is enough to kindle a perpetual flame. For others, two hundred books may kindle nothing. Who's to say how much is enough?

My list was a start, but one could read every book and still remain what many college students are: idea-rich and experience-poor. To unbalance that, I offered an option: Instead of

writing an outside paper for class (three were asked for), students could spend the time volunteering at a soup kitchen or a shelter for the homeless, or serving as a Big Brother or Sister, or perhaps teaching an illiterate to read. I gave the classes a list of places to volunteer. Many did.

The experiences touched parts of their inner selves that they never realized were there. All the students who took the option for community service also found time to write of it.

One paper—to end where we began—came from Bill Tisherman: "I've taken my first step—nay, leap—from absorption to action. I walked into the Literacy Council of Prince Georges County Tuesday and said, 'I want to teach someone to read.'

"The volunteer grabbed my hand and exclaimed, 'Oh my goodness, you have made my day!' We sat down and she described the program to me—the training, the curriculum, the philosophy, and above all, the success. The pure joy in her face and words was incredible, contagious. She made me feel like a saint, and I hadn't even started yet!

"Once the formalities were done, she flicked her head toward a man on the other side of the room, speaking with another volunteer. That man, like me, had walked in that morning, except he had come to learn.

"Our respective interviews ended at just about the same moment, and I spoke briefly with the other man as we left the office. He is employed as a factory worker, and had decided to learn to read so that he could read stories to his three-year-old daughter. And I told him that I had decided to teach because, as a writer, I didn't want to go on writing without doing something to help others take advantage of what I do.

"Suddenly the gap between us—I, a Harvard graduate, and he, an eighth-grade dropout—narrowed to nothing. We were both drawn to the same place at the same point in time for the same purpose: to help others. It didn't matter that we were on opposite sides of the literacy fence, because we are now both on the right track.

"We shook hands, wished each other luck, and parted. I walked away feeling great, knowing that it's so much better to

do than to talk about doing. Action is the right track, the right track is endless."

Bill Tisherman's zeal should not be put down as the mere fervor of a newcomer. He understands that the practice of non-violence isn't just a matter of ending war. It's also a matter of creating peace in our own souls and in the soul of the person next to us. Teaching someone to read is one of hundreds of ways of peacemaking.

Now that I've had the privilege of teaching some of those ways, I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of students are waiting to have their hearts turned. I suspect the number is larger than we dare think. Let's start daring.

September 1992

WHY WE MUST TEACH PEACE

A question settled in my mind a few years ago and refused to leave until I not only answered it but also acted on the answer. *If peace is what every government says it seeks, and peace is the yearning of every heart, why aren't we studying it and teaching it in schools?*

Governments and citizens proclaim that mathematics, languages, and science are their goals, and students are required to take those and other courses, as if the future of the species depended on them. At commencements, graduates are told to go into the world as peacemakers. Yet in most schools, peace is so unimportant that no place is found for it in the curriculum.

Rather than whine about this, which is what too many in the syndicated column trade are content to do most of the time, I decided to go into the schools myself.

In 1982, I began teaching courses in alternatives to violence. After being with some three thousand students in three universities and two high schools, I can give the preliminary report that, contrary to what some might say, with opened minds and receptive hearts, peace can be taught and learned.

I use the qualification "preliminary" because *peace*, like *love*, is a cheapened word. Nuclear missiles are now called "peace-keepers" and are presumably equipped with multiple "peace-heads." We are told repeatedly that the way to ensure peace is to be ready for war. Nearly all world governments, with an annual global arms budget of \$900 billion, preach peace through strength rather than strength through peace.

The military does what it is paid to do: deal with conflicts through guns, armies, or bombs. Militarists believe wholeheartedly—and deserve credit for the intensity of their beliefs—that violence is the way to stop violence. But it is obvious that history proves that approach wrong—if war were effective, all our problems would have been solved thousands of years ago. More people might embrace that fact, however, if the alternatives to guns, armies, and bombs were taught and learned. If the alternatives aren't made available, how can they be applied?

As a pacifist, I am uneasy with the term "peace studies." It will do for now, but a more exact description will eventually be needed. What I have been teaching is peace through nonviolence. That, too, is somewhat imprecise. The sharpest phrase is peace through soul force or, to rely on Gandhi's favorite word, *satyagraha*. Nonviolence isn't just about ending wars. It's about creating peace in our own hearts, often the last place many people ever find it.

Studying peace through nonviolence is as much about getting the bombs out of our hearts as it is about getting them out of the Pentagon budget. Every problem we have, every conflict, whether among our family or friends, or among governments, will be addressed either through violent force or nonviolent force. No third option exists. I teach my classes because I believe in nonviolent force—the force of justice, the force of love, the force of sharing wealth, the force of ideas, the force of organized resistance to corrupt power. Fighting with those kinds of forces is the essence of nonviolence.

The first class of every semester I ask my students, "Is anyone here armed?" No one has ever raised a hand. "You are all

armed," I reply. "You're armed with ideas, and you're in school to become armed with more ideas."

Occasionally a student will come back with the charge that I asked a trick question. Of course I did. Nonviolence is a tricky subject. The beauty and sanity of it doesn't get into our heads easily or automatically. It takes years and years of study. Why is it that we dismiss nonviolence so quickly by saying that it's a wonderful theory but unreal, yet we are willing to go slowly with other complex subjects?

After I ask the question about arms, I pose a second one by listing ten names to be identified: U. S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, William Westmoreland, Jane Addams, Jeannette Rankin, A. J. Muste, Adin Ballou, and Dorothy Day. Everyone can routinely identify the first five: All are generals. It is rare that anyone knows the second five, all believers or practitioners of nonviolence. A few take a guess that the last person was an actress and singer, as in Doris Day.

The students aren't to blame for knowing only the first five names. In elementary school and high school, and continuing through college, they are taught the history of America's seven declared wars and a fair portion of the 137 undeclared wars. Violence is taught as lore—the Alamo, Custer's Last Stand, the ride of Paul Revere, Lexington and Concord, Gettysburg. If SAT scores were based on high-schoolers' knowledge of bloodshed and militarism, we would have a nation of young geniuses.

To teach peace through nonviolence is to give the young a chance to develop a philosophy of force. It's to expose them to the history, techniques, and practitioners of nonviolence.

To choose to live by a philosophy of nonviolent force is to choose Jesus over Caesar, Vincent de Paul over Napoleon, William Penn over George Washington, Jeannette Rankin over Franklin Roosevelt, Dorothy Day over Lyndon Johnson, Maria Montessori over Margaret Thatcher.

Students, or at least the wary ones, often say they are glad former flower children like me occasionally turn up on college faculties, but in the real world nonviolence won't work and hasn't worked. Look what happened, they say, to Jesus, Gand-

hi, King, and a lot of other pacifists. I answer with the only honest reply available. Nonviolence is a risky philosophy to live by. It is no guarantee of safety. All that can be said of it is that it's less a failure than violence.

Those who prefer violent force, I tell my students, must justify the deaths of this century's seventy-eight million war victims. The number is a 500 percent increase over the last century. Those who choose the handgun as the most effective way to control or persuade the next person need to talk to the ten thousand people who will be killed by gunshot in the next year. Those who prefer violent force must explain the more than forty wars or conflicts raging in the world today, killing an estimated 41,000 people a month—most of them poor boys slaughtered by other poor boys. Those who believe America is a generous nation must account for the 38,000 children who die in the Third World every day from diseases that could be prevented by vaccinations that cost \$10 per child. The Congressional Research Office reports that since 1977, U.S. development and food aid to Third World nations has decreased by 16 percent while military aid has increased 53 percent.

Courses on nonviolence are easily designed. What isn't easy is shifting people's thinking. More than 1,200 U.S. campuses allow the Pentagon into their classrooms with ROTC programs, with some 108,000 students enrolled. At the same time, only 50 colleges offer a degree in peace studies, though others do offer concentrations, like the University of Portland's Certificate Program.

Only rarely though does a school promote itself for its peace program. How often do college presidents tell prospective students, "Come to my school because we have an excellent program in nonviolent studies"? Instead, they recruit students by talking of the new computer center, or the business school, or the new gym.

The militarists aren't to blame. I'm to blame for not doing more to get peace courses into the schools. The peace movement is to blame for the same reason. Liberal arts professors have to answer for their laziness in not fighting for courses in nonviolence.

But in the end, it is students themselves who must supply the moral pressure to get those courses. It's their tuition, their world, and their future. Peter Kropotkin, a Russian pacifist and communitarian, advised the young: "Think about the kind of world you want to live and work in. What do you need to build that world? Demand that your teachers teach you that!" It's advice that students—and their teachers—should take to heart.

This year I am teaching a daily class in nonviolence at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Bethesda, Maryland, from 7:40 to 8:30 A.M. I have courses also at Georgetown University Law Center and the University of Maryland.

Few students have ever taken a class in nonviolence. Because of that, I often think to myself that I would do better to be teaching a course in linear physics and speaking Swahili. The students would understand it sooner. Yet, here is what students have written in their course evaluations:

"This course dispelled a lot of myths I had about peace and pacifists and introduced me to a completely new way of seeing the world. And I believe I have changed—even my friends want to know what's been 'brainwashing' me!" "I had an argument with my brother. I lost my cool and hit him. Unlike in the past when this happened, I felt disappointed with myself. If one wants to contribute to making the world a place of nonviolence, one must begin by eliminating the violence in oneself."

None of my teaching interferes with my full-time work at the *Washington Post*, where I have been privileged to be writing since 1968. If anything, my journalism and teaching are mutually reinforcing. Writing is thinking in solitude; teaching is thinking in public. Both places, an audience is there to challenge whatever is false and endorse whatever is true.

My students are a bracing mix of intellectuals, skeptics, and seekers of peace whose company is unimaginably uplifting. Whether they are in third-year law or third-year high school, I try to create a class atmosphere in which the study and discussion of nonviolence is directed toward giving everyone a chance to embrace a life of both personal and political peacemaking. What other empowerment, save love, is as needed or liberating?

For some students, the embracing comes quickly. They are amazed at the breadth of the literature on nonviolence. Others hang back, wanting more evidence that nonviolence isn't just a philosophy for hugging trees at high tide and full moon. It doesn't matter when the assent occurs. In all journeys, someone is first on board the train, someone else is the fiftieth, one hundredth, or ten millionth. That we get on, not when we get on, is what's crucial.

Teaching nonviolence is an act of faith: the belief that students will dig deep into their reserves of inner courage and love to embrace the highest calling we know, peacemaking.

September 20, 1991

GIVE PEACE LESSONS A CHANCE

In the opening weeks of school, I look at my students and ask myself what I imagine every teacher is wondering now: Will they get it?

My "it" is a selection of the methods, theories, and history of nonviolence that form the core of courses I teach at Georgetown University Law Center, the University of Maryland, and first period every morning at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

I'm not even sure I have a right to ask my question, or at least not to be thought nervy if I do. "Getting it" implies that the getting will happen during the semester, as if an educational clock is running and the game ends the final minute of the final class, with a test and grade determining winners and losers.

I learned the falsity of that from a former student who wrote to me a while back from Morocco where she was serving in a rural area as a Peace Corps volunteer. She confessed to having little understanding of the course at the time, that being a moment when she was impatient to graduate, but now that she

was out in the world and involved in a small but exhilarating way in the works of peace, the theories of nonviolence and pacifism were coming back to her. They did make sense. They had been in her soul all along.

An old Chinese proverb sums this up: "I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand."

What I learned from that student is that teaching is an act of faith—to believe that every flower will bloom when it's ready, that the intellectual eyelids of our students will open only when they can take in the light. Teachers are on the margin of the process, which is close enough.

This is true, especially, in a course on alternatives to violence. In nine years of teaching it to some 2,500 students, I've had only a few—four or five maybe—who had had a similar course before.

To have half a chance, peace studies courses ought to be taught in first grade, then the second, and on up through high school and college and then as an elective in every graduate, medical, and law school.

If we expose the young to language, math, and science in the earliest grades, why not peacemaking? Or else we should lay off wailing about the pandemic violence reflected in the world's current thirty-five wars or conflicts, or that the leading cause of injury among American women is being beaten by the men they live with, or dozens of American cities annually setting record homicide rates, or that 95 percent of children's television shows have violent themes. If alternatives to violence aren't taught in schools to counter the lessons of violence outside schools, what hope of reform is there?

Much more than many professional educators, students realize that the absence of peace education cheats them, that without it a student must, in Thoreau's phrase "postpone myself." The quick-witted pick this up instinctively, like crows pecking at corn. One of my brightest students at Georgetown law school last year, a scrapper who could have taken on Clarence Darrow in a courtroom, came away from the course—"Law, Conscience and Nonviolence"—knowing all he needed to know, that he didn't know much: "The subject of nonviolence fascinates me," he

wrote in a paper. "It represents the highest virtues of man, as well as the only true assurance of our continued existence. The ability to look beyond the fear and self-interest of everyone, to me is the noblest trait a person can acquire. I am amazed, not that the movement has gained the strength it has, although that is remarkable, but that the idea was able to find one follower in the first place. . . . If nonviolence could be compared to grade school, I would have to say that I am still in kindergarten. I can't wait for first grade to start."

There's the core satisfaction in teaching, realizing I hadn't taught him a thing but, instead, nudged him to pursue truth out of his own desire. All I did in the course was expose his mind to a few ideas from Gandhi, King, Day, Thoreau, Jesus, Amos—model lawbreakers all—and then let him, after nineteen years of formal education, go back to start over, guided by his own tastes and choices.

Intellectual arousal happens over and over. The writings of history's peacemakers, matched by studying their lives of costly resistance to state or cultural violence, touch minds. The first class of each semester, I issue a warning: If you aren't a risk-taker, this is no course to be taking. The riskiness involves coming into class thinking and living one way and then, four or five months later, leaving as a different person. Maybe perplexed. Unsettled. Stirred. But a new self emerging from an old self.

It's impossible to know where students and their feelings will be by the end of the course. If it was known, we'd be programming, not educating, them. They'd be printouts, not learners, Ken Macrorie, for years a cherished professor of English at Western Michigan University, wrote in "Twenty Teachers": "Students need to make the knowledge of the past *their own* before they can become learners, and most of them don't. . . . Conventional school embraces objectivity, and considers subjectivity the property of the unwashed. It embraces the conscious and dismisses the unconscious. The result is that when we leave school we behave like half-human beings and know not our powers. This suppression of feeling occurs at all levels of schooling."

Halfway through the semester, curiosity will overtake me and

I'll ask students to write an essay on what they've learned by then. A few years ago, when I had a class at Georgetown Day School, a senior boy, with gifts for reflection, wrote: "I believe that this course is planting seeds in me. I cannot currently list what I learned. I expect, rather, that after the seeds have had a few years to grow in my heart and mind, I will be able to recognize how this course has changed me. I am taking this course for my long-term good, not for the short-term. It's taken me a while to realize that your approach has been to avoid giving us the answers. Instead, you encourage us to read King and Gandhi so we can find our own answers. (Correct me if I'm wrong; this is my perception)."

I'm expecting another bracing year with students. Then there are former students, who keep reporting in from one Morocco or another. I heard from one the other day, a young woman in her third year at Yale who was in my class four years ago at Wilson High. I looked up her evaluation of the course. She ended: "One last thing. Something I've always suspected that has been confirmed in this class. It's easier for people to remain uneducated. If they refuse to know, they can't be held responsible. As soon as someone learns about all the wrongs, sorrows, victims, he becomes guilty if he doesn't take some sort of action. For this reason, I admire every member of this class—people willing to learn and be responsible enough to form opinions, take action."

Risky action. Unconventional action. Nonviolent action. Peacemaking action.

December 29, 1992

PEACE EDUCATION: THE SANE SOLUTION

Politically and intellectually, nothing is more needed in the coming Clinton administration than an office of peace education.

An assistant secretary for peace education, in either the Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of Education, would bring a federal presence where one is needed. Only a few of the nation's 78,000 elementary schools, 28,000 high schools, and 3,000 colleges and universities have a curriculum in nonviolent conflict resolution or offer courses in peacemaking.

The effect of this academic neglect is peace illiteracy, a land awash in violence. Most U.S. cities saw record rates of homicide in the 1980s, with no letup in the 1990s. A violent crime is committed every seventeen seconds. The leading cause of injury among American women is being beaten at home by a man. More than 100,000 weapons are brought into schools every day. U.S. militarism, aside from the lust for interventionism, means that America sells arms to 142 of the planet's 180 governments.

Such words as *conflict*, *dispute*, and *argument* are neutral terms. They mean we need to change the way we're doing things. The changing will be done either through violent force or nonviolent force. From early childhood—from exposure to television cartoons, of which 95 percent have violent themes, to living in a society where military leaders are lionized—the ways of violent force are reinforced and, from the evidence, well understood. If a conflict enters a relationship—whether at home in a family or between governments—it often is settled with fists, guns, or armies.

It is impossible, logically, to have conflicts dealt with through nonviolent force—negotiation, compromise, organized resistance, noncooperation, civil disobedience, civilian-based defense—because those methods were never taught in school. It is as if the United States were a nation where schools did not teach math. Adding $1 + 1$ could mean 6 or 35. Subtracting 5 from 10 could equal 49. After the chaos of this math ignorance became unbearable someone raised the question: Could it be that our math deficiency is linked to the fact that the subject was never taught in school?

That's about where we are regarding the teaching of nonviolent conflict resolution and peacemaking. We don't know

because we weren't taught: not us adults yesterday, nor our kids today. As a foregone and disastrous result, we are mostly peace illiterates all but helpless to deal with conflicts. Is it imaginable that we would graduate students from high school or college without ever teaching them math and say, good luck, go muddle through? That's how we do it regarding conflicts: We graduate muddlers, and then ask, in false amazement, Why is America so violent?

A federal office of peace education would be a resource center for school boards, administrators, teachers, students, and parents who request help either to create or expand the necessary courses. One of its services would be curriculum development. It would coordinate the successful programs now working in all parts of the country, from those of the Oregon Peace Institute and the Iowa Peace Institute, to the teacher-training workshops in Florida organized by the Peace Education Foundation in Miami.

Courses in peacemaking and nonviolent conflict resolution are pedagogically similar to those in any other subject. Starting in first grade, society prepares kids for some of life's problems that a knowledge of language, science, or math may possibly solve. Yet we have children in school for at least twelve years—or sixteen years plus graduate school for many—and teach them little or nothing about nonviolent ways of dealing with the predictable problems created by conflict.

Then we call the cops, social workers, psychiatrists, judges, jailers, and deviancy experts when homicides, spouse and child abuse, violent crime, and war continue. Go into the world, we tell our students, the world at its worst.

In "Peace Education," professor Ian Harris of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, writes: "Human beings are used to thinking about violence and war as problems to be controlled rather than thinking positively about peace as an achievement, as a state of being within their control. Peace education rests on an active vision of peace where skilled individuals, who have been trained in the ways of nonviolence, intervene in conflict situations to manage them without using violent force."

In ten years of teaching course on nonviolence to some three

thousand students at the high school, college, and law-school levels, I have had the joy of witnessing minds being opened—and, for sure, souls stirred—by the literature of peacemaking. It ranges from the philosophical writings of Gandhi and James Douglass to Gene Sharp's politics of nonviolent action.

Early this semester, I asked my students at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School to write their reflections on three essays: "Reverence for Life" by Albert Schweitzer, "Axioms of Nonviolence" by Lanzo del Vasto, and "Nonviolence as a Way of Life" by Robert McGlasson. These were in the first chapter of the course text, *Alternatives to Violence*.

Josh Suniewick, a senior who had the lead in the recent school play, wrote: "Sitting in class every morning has been a bit overwhelming. It may have something to do with my present mental unsteadiness. Ideally, I would like to go through life with horse blinders on but, instead, I reluctantly find my brain thinking constantly. Reading these articles has been a somewhat confusing experience: to realize why such logical points are so iconoclastic and revolutionary. Why haven't they been practiced yet? One article, 'Reverence for Life,' improved my outlook. It made me stop and feel good about humanity's potential. The overall message to me was that if enough people act kindly, others will react in an equal and positive kindness. It just baffles me why more people don't know about this."

In those schools that respect peace education, the debate is not whether to teach the subject but how. One camp says diversify, the other, unify.

For course instruction, diversifiers argue that the study of the theories, history and practitioners of nonviolent conflict resolution should be filtered into as many academic fields as possible. In high schools and colleges, that means adding peace instruction to courses in political science, sociology, government, psychology, international relations, religion, and even English. That way, a diversity of students who would otherwise not be exposed to the ideas and ideals of peacemaking could learn of them, caught unawares or not.

Unifiers say that a separate department with its own faculty

and budget and with a large offering of courses, not a filtered smattering, is needed. This assures that a message is sent to students: Peace education matters; it is as crucial to living sanely and thinking clearly as any other academic discipline, and arguably more so.

I favor the unified approach. No one says, Let's teach English by filtering it into sociology, or let's teach history by dropping it into government courses. Peace education is as much a distinct discipline as any other conventional academic offering. Unless administrators and school boards see it that way, rather than as an intellectual frill taught by people who emotionally never left the 1960s, then students will be graduated in a state of deficit learning. It leaves them vulnerable to conflict and in a state of ignorance on how they can try to settle those conflicts nonviolently. They are more likely to become peace-breakers, not peacemakers.

It's true that if a school does possess the foresight to have a peace studies department, the students who take the course will tend to be the already highly motivated or those strongly committed to nonviolence. The solution to preaching only to the choir is for the school president, dean of students, and faculty advisers to promote the courses. This promotion needs to be precise and emphatic, ranging from giving peace education prominence in recruitment literature to highlighting it at convocations. At the elementary and secondary level, during the student assembly that opens the academic year, the principal can stress that this is a school where peace education is valued and taught.

By creating an office of peace education, the Clinton administration would align itself with the many experienced educators long at work in the field. These include George McKenna III, the superintendent of the Inglewood Unified School District in California, who has called for mandatory courses in nonviolence in all schools in his state. Another is Ruth Charney, with twenty years of teaching in New York City and Western Massachusetts. In "Teaching Children to Care," she writes: "No school advocates the use of violence, but few would define

nonviolence as a core curriculum. I envision schools actively engaged in a curriculum of nonviolence. . . . I see it as a distinctive way of acting and thinking that permeates the entire school." And from there the entire society.

A federal office of peace education, if allowed to be innovative, could be decisive in turning the country away from the vise of violence now gripping it. It would affirm all those now in the schools teaching mediation, conflict resolution, theories in peacemaking, alternatives to violence. It would be an overdue message from a president who has called for change to those teachers of change: You're on to something; peacemaking can be taught.

January 27, 1991

SOLUTIONS IN THE SCHOOLYARD

Teaching has its heartfelt and resounding moments, and for me one of them came the morning of January 17, 1991, when I was leaving Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. Some students of mine were taking control of their lives. Independent control.

I had just finished meeting with them, a group of forty juniors and seniors in a course called "Alternatives to Violence." On the eastern edge of the school's front lawn, about 150 students had gathered around a wide stump of an oak tree. Atop it was a young woman giving a speech. When I moved closer, I recognized her as a student from my class. She was speaking, to a rapt audience, about the Persian Gulf War and the need for nonviolent sanctions to be given a chance.

The evening before, as U.S. bomber pilots began leading a campaign of slaughter and destruction against Iraqi soldiers and citizens, George Bush announced that "the world could wait no longer." He was wrong. This part of the world could wait, as small and peripheral as it seemed on the lawn fronting the

school. All semester, while reading and discussing essays on pacifism by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Leo Tolstoy, and a long list of other practitioners of nonviolence, the Pentagon's preparations for war hovered over the collective consciousness of the class.

Now that the bombing and killing had begun, as more than three-fourths of the class had predicted by a show of hands one morning in October, the time had come for action. I looked among the students at the rally. I knew about twenty, all from my class. Some I would have figured to be there, because I had listened to their antiwar views through the semester. Others surprised me—reserved ones who hadn't said much in class one way or the other about the Gulf.

The senior girl who had been speaking when I came over was in that group. I listened in amazement. Where did all that passion come from, and this suddenly? And what inner fires had been burning in the next speaker, a senior boy who spoke knowledgeably about draft resistance? Be aware of your rights, he said, and went on to tell about the national groups that provide counseling on conscientious objection.

When the rally dispersed, four students took a large sign—Honk for Peace—and stood behind it on the highway in front of the school. A clamor of honks began. The group, joined by others, decided to cut classes and go be educated in democracy by visiting the antiwar protest in front of the White House.

They learned there that they weren't alone, that resistance to the gulf war is spreading daily in this country and in Europe. Bush has vowed that "this will not be another Vietnam." Wrong again. It took less than a week for America's streets—from San Diego to Boston—to be filled with citizens expressing their opposition and contempt for the same kind of war ethic that dragged the United States into Vietnam.

It is common of late for Vietnam veterans to return to Southeast Asia, in exercises of catharsis and reconciliation, and in many cases to ask forgiveness of the villagers who were bombed and sprayed by American soldiers. In twenty years, it could happen that today's U.S. bomber pilots—now so cocky as they

flash thumbs-up signs for the cameras at takeoff—will be returning to Iraq seeking reconciliation and peace. The antiwar demonstrators are saying, rightly, Let's seek it now.

Up against the might of a war-approving Congress and the domination of the media by the Pentagon's version of events, plus television's one-sided reliance on ex-generals turned "military analysts"—why no peace analysts on these programs?—a few high-school kids making speeches on a stump and holding peace signs is indeed small. Gandhi, as usual, had a thought: "Nonviolence is the finest quality of the soul, but it is developed by practice. Almost anything you do will seem insignificant but it is important that you do it."

Three days after war began in the gulf, the semester was over and class ended. We tell our children not to fight in the schoolyard, not to hit brothers, sisters, or playmates, and to use reason and dialogue to settle conflicts. Seek alternatives to violence. It's a sound message, except all this school year much of the country's adults supported politicians and warriors who pushed the opposite ethic in the Middle East.

Three of my students—articulate and spunky even at 7:40 A.M.—were consistently skeptical about nonviolence, but they were willing to push themselves, and the rest of us, to think freshly about old problems. Moving beyond patented or conventional boundaries, and seeing life differently and acting in the riskiness of that new vision, is a breakthrough to be celebrated, not minimized. Wherever the newness leads, the students will go into adulthood as discoverers, not imitators, and least of all as followers.