

“We Rise on the Shoulders of Others”

Reflections by and about Scott Kennedy, RCNV's purpose and Future

Our lives have been touched and changed in many ways by our connections to Scott Kennedy, co-founder of the Resource Center for Nonviolence, who died November 19, 2011. He taught us so much and we will continue to be inspired and learn from his life. Here we present a compilation: some of Scott's words about RCNV and its philosophy, and memories from a few of Scott's friends and colleagues. Also enclosed are remarks by Deena Hurwitz, former RCNV staff member, on the occasion of Scott receiving the 2008 El-Hibri Foundation Peace Prize. Scott was adamant that we continue to build on what he started, and he was very excited about the possibilities for the future of the Resource Center with our new building at 612 Ocean Street.



Two generations: Scott and Pete, in front of the new RCNV building at 612 Ocean St., October, 2011. They proudly display a 1980 photo of the renovation of the first Resource Center building at 515 Broadway that features Scott holding Peter as a baby.

On the acquisition of 612 Ocean, October, 2011

“We got probably 30 or 40 email messages from people congratulating us on the move,” says Scott Kennedy, who has been with the RCNV since its 1976 founding, when a group of activists from Isla Vista, Calif. decided to build a center for nonviolence. “We came to the conviction that there was great value in establishing a physical place in the community that people could come to rely on.”

One of the emails the RCNV received regarding their move came from Mairead Maguire, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the Irish Peace People. Maguire's message states, “May I offer you all my congratulations and best wishes on the wonderful news of the opening of the new Resource Center for Nonviolence, in Santa Cruz. It looks like a beautiful Centre but the best resources are the group of wonderful happy-looking activists taken outside their new home for nonviolence.”

Kennedy says McGuire's email makes an essential point. “Buildings are important and this is a really big change and improvement for the center, but the most important thing is the people,” says Kennedy. “A building is just a tool or avenue for us that hopefully will help support and sustain our work. We've been here for three decades and this is a chance to reinvent or regenerate the Resource Center for Nonviolence. We are very aware that we need to set the stage, if not pass the ball to the next generation of activists. And although the facility was built in the 1960s, Kennedy said, “It will feel like a new beginning to us.”

Continued....

From Friends & Colleagues....

“Scott Kennedy spent almost his entire life working to promote social change and help those who were less fortunate, with much of that work done through the Center which he co-founded in 1976,” The San Jose Mercury News said in its obituary. “He was a man who would go out of his way to help others, and was stubbornly driven. Kennedy was known for being passionate, intelligent and at times intense, and his death is a huge loss for the community. Friends and colleagues remember him as someone who had an amazing energy and who had a sharp sense of humor. In his political career, as in his advocacy, he was dedicated and tenacious.”

He maintained his radical commitment throughout his life. One of my favorite memories goes back to the 1990s when we were struggling at FOR over strategy and action to fight the U.S.-U.N. economic sanctions on Iraq which were killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. Scott had the answer: buy a large generator, bring it to Iraq, give it to a hospital without power, violate the U.S. sanctions and expose the evil intent to kill Iraqi children. His plan called for serious institutional civil disobedience, the likes of which none of us had ever known. In the end, other activist friends undertook the project and broke the law, but Scott's daring vision pushed all of us deeper into Jesus' commandment, “Love your enemies.”

Scott was always organizing. He took action, created new organizations, supported every peace and justice cause, brought people together, raised funds, and built movements. In 1976, Scott, Kris and their friends co-founded the Resource Center for Nonviolence, which remains perhaps the best local peace and justice center in the nation. For decades he ran their Middle East Program. I was excited to hear about the purchase of the former Christian Science church in Santa Cruz as their new headquarters. While other peace groups are folding, Scott and his friends were forging ahead. They know that peace work is needed now more than ever, and that the funds for such projects can be raised. It is one of his last achievements.

— John Dear

People, Place and Purpose

Excerpts from a slideshow Scott gave at RCNV's Oct. 2011 Annual Dinner:

"In the 1970's, Isla Vista served as a base and launching pad for many community initiatives. Some hard-earned lessons stay with us today, more than 35 years later: thinking globally, acting locally; the importance of face-to-face community as a learning environment; working together from a supportive circle; consensus as a way of making decisions, and drawing on one another as resources. And from the spirit of Gandhi: nonviolence as a way of life -- working toward personal change and social transformation.



Scott talks with Tom Noddy at Occupy Santa Cruz, Fall 2011.

and those lives have been touched in some way, small or significant, in 3 1/2 decades of work. **Place** — a facility that serves as the home and springboard for many community activities of which RCNV is in some cases, central, but many more initiatives and ongoing efforts of which RCNV is but one small part -- supportive and working with others on many fronts. **Purpose** — the society in which we work, of which we are products, is in as great a need as ever -- for people motivated by a desire for peace and justice, informed by a commitment to human rights and opportunity for all people, committed to the transforming power of active nonviolence -- a power that empowers and remakes individuals and challenges structures of violence and promises a more equitable and peaceful society."

On RCNV's 30th Anniversary in 2006...

Peace and Justice: Our Past, Our Passion, Our Path

The Center consciously tries to learn from the bold, courageous and imaginative actions of those who have gone before us and those who face different challenges in other parts of the world. We think and learn from the work and insights of Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez and Barbara Deming. We also study and seek out the insights of many other sources, including the feminist, anarchist, environmental and other social change movements, anti-nuclear and human rights campaigns, acts of Israeli military refuseniks and Colombia peace campaigners, solidarity accompaniment by internationals in Sri Lanka and nonviolent direct action in Palestine. Truly "we rise on the shoulders of others" in the struggle for a more just and peaceful world. So we sponsor study groups,

Over the years, the buildings have changed. But the formula has not:

People — actively committed to nonviolence, whether staff, Steering Committee, interns and volunteers -- those who support from and benefit from our many different activities



Joan Baez at an RCNV workshop with Danilo Dolci, the Gandhi of Sicily, 1982.

Scott Kennedy's death is a loss to not only family and friends, but to the larger family of nonviolent soldiers he has taught, shared with, laughed with, and loved. I'm fortunate to consider myself a member of his compassionate and passionate army. Not many people manage to make a dent in the world of conflicts, but Scott's work in the Middle East defies all cynicism and hopelessness.

At this time in the world of extraordinary current events, we now need those of his nonviolent army to infuse the enthusiastic thousands with the true spirit of Gandhi, and of the minions who have steadfastly stood their ground through the waves of violence with strength, love, caring, and the willingness to suffer rather than inflict suffering. May he make the crossing smoothly and joyfully.

— Joan Baez

invite speakers, and bring films and art exhibits to help us understand how others employ active nonviolence to build a better world.

Active nonviolence is more than simply a personal disavowal of violence, though it certainly is that in many situations. "Soul force" involves the exercise of collective will and struggle to overcome unjust structure and systemic violence. Nonviolence of the kind of that Gandhi described and sought to embody is a form of waging conflict, of engaging in conscious and persistent efforts to prevent violence, to reduce or overturn institutionalized structures of violence, and to build constructive alternatives. The commitment to nonviolence as set out by Gandhi encompasses all aspects of one's life.

At its best, the Resource Center provides a supportive environment in which those committed to positive social change can examine the situation in which we live, ascertain hopeful and humane courses of action, and join together and support one another in pursuing those goals. This is encouraged by helping to create small clusters of people working in face-to-face community, determining possible courses of action and then joining together to take action.

An organization must continually reinvent itself to avoid ossification and complacency. For the first half of the Center's life and work, we thought an end to the Cold War and Super Power rivalry would usher in a new day, a peace dividend domestically, and international cooperation. We worked with the anti-nuclear movement and against our nation's "low intensity conflict" in various parts of the world. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and especially since 9/11, we are struggling to have an impact on a new global hegemony, on our own country with its imperial overreach, adolescent bullying and ready resort to war. As Palestinian Ambassador Safieh put it when he visited Santa Cruz, "we want the principles that the United States preaches at home to be applied in our foreign policy abroad."

Surely we face formidable challenges by advocating nonviolence in a culture obsessed with technical fixes and immediate gratification driven by fear and predisposed to the application of violence to solve problems. Our achievement is modest. And our impact is perhaps most often felt in our own lives and lives of those with whom we are privileged to interact. But we remain more convinced than ever that a more humane future depends on an ever deepening understanding of how active nonviolence works, a growing appreciation of nonviolence as a method of social change and personal transformation, and a widening use of nonviolent means to engage in conflicts within various societies and between nations and peoples. ♦



Scott with Jim Douglass and Peter Klotz-Chamberlin, 2008. Jim spoke about his book "JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters" at RCNV and First Congregational Church.

Whenever I think of Scott I remember a Christmas card that he sent many years ago, in the early 80s. He used the famous Margaret Mead quote: "Never think that a small group of determined people cannot make change. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Above the caption was a group photo showing Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and various other political figures in intense and serious discussion.

For me that card sums up Scott's sense of irony, his understanding of the world situation, his realistic assessment of the odds we face – and his determination to go on working nonviolently for change, grinning if possible.

Jim and I have known Scott for a long time – from the old Isla Vista days to more recent days when Jim travelled with Scott to Israel/Palestine, and went to speak about John F. Kennedy at the Resource Center.

Scott was always someone we trusted; we knew that he had good insights and good sense. We could rely on what he said. We could count on his promise. In all his work for peace and for justice these personal qualities stood out. We are all the poorer for his absence. He will be greatly missed. In his honor small groups of determined people must go on making change, and grinning in the face of the odds. *Scott Kennedy, presente!*

— Shelley and Jim Douglass