

A Lifetime Devoted to Nonviolence: Scott Kennedy

Dec. 9, 1948—November 19, 2011



By Don Monkerud

The following interview was conducted with Scott Kennedy at his dining room table in 2001 for a book of interviews, Santa Cruz, A Creative Community. Scott was deeply involved in Santa Cruz politics, served on the City Council, and was an advocate of the rights of Palestinians. In addition, he played a key role at the Resource Center for Nonviolence, and took groups to the Middle East to promote peace and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. He brought a fresh, creative perspective to life and lived his ideals.

Known for political activism, Santa Cruz was one of the first communities in the U.S. to ban nuclear weapons, a move aimed squarely at Lockheed Corporation, one of America's penultimate weapons manufacturers. The ban became a model for a national Nuclear Weapons Freeze, just as Santa Cruz protests against U.S. intervention in Central America became a model for a national Witness for Peace movement. The Resource Center for Nonviolence helped kick off both of these efforts, and along with others, Scott Kennedy was there from the beginning.

In 1949 when one-year-old Scott Kennedy moved to San Jose's Willow Glen area, plum, cherry, and apricot orchards marched to the city's boundaries and bucolic rural scenes shouldered the small city's outlying areas. It was a time of peace and prosperity that left its mark on young Scott and played a role in his fervent devotion to nonviolence.

Of Scotch, Irish, English and German ancestry, Scott's parents left their families in Newman Grove, Nebraska, a farming town of 1000 northwest of Omaha, to seek a better life. His parents' fathers had both been mayor of the town and, during the depression, both experienced reversals in economic status. His mother's family lost their business, while his father's father acquired a Firestone tire dealership and Mobil oil distributorship. His father and mother were in the same class in school and attended the Methodist Church in a town that boasted seven protestant churches. Five children followed through the years, Scott being the youngest.

Scott's father took over the oil business from his father, but in 1948 his storage tanks burned and the city council, fearing another fire, would not allow him to install new ones, even underground. Additionally, efforts to build a gymnasium for the local school ran into a

tight-fisted, anti-tax school board that Scott's father felt relegated education and his children's futures to a minor role in the community. Meanwhile, his father's brother wrote enthusiastically from the Alameda Navy base about the excellent education system in California, wonderful mild weather and economic opportunity just waiting to be realized. The family packed up and headed west.

With money they received from selling their house in Nebraska, they purchased a four-bedroom home in the white middle-class suburb of Willow Glen for \$25,000. Scott's father got a job as the sales manager at the Tire Service Company in San Jose, and he quickly became the top salesman. His mother became a housewife while Scott attended kindergarten, walked to school, and attended Willow Glen Elementary, Edwin Markham Junior High, and Willow Glen High School. He played team sports, had lots of friends, and lived what he considered a normal childhood.

"San Jose was a great place to grow up," said Scott. "By the time I got to school, my parents were on automatic pilot for parenting. Both extremes were already established in school—the oldest children in the family were achievers and the one next to me a troublemaker—so they were ready for whatever path I chose. I had a pretty banal middle-class upbringing; my dad was a workaholic and Mother was the mainstay of the family. My brother was experimentally pushing all the boundaries and I saw my parents struggling with him, so I didn't give them any trouble."

Although Scott's parents were not demonstratively religious and didn't emphasize a belief system, his father firmly believed that businesses should be honest and have integrity. His family's attendance at the local Methodist church and their values affected him. For example, he recalled a controversy his father had at work because his boss continually referred to black people as "N..." His father's protest fell on deaf ears until he began using anti-Italian slurs. The boss got the point and stopped using derogatory slurs.

When a family with a Peruvian mother and Scottish father attempted to buy a house on his block, the neighbors tried to prevent the sale. Scott's parents were outspoken in support of the family moving into the neighborhood and once they did, their son became Scott's closest friend. His parents also supported Scott's education, which included Friday afternoon religious instruction at the Methodist Church,

and a school-sponsored citizenship training that included a savings account offered by Bank of America.

Scott's oldest sister, Diane, attended Stanford and shocked her family when she announced she was becoming a Methodist missionary and going to spend three years in Uruguay. "Good middle class kids just didn't go to weird foreign countries," Scott recalled. He corresponded with his sister in Uruguay by reel-to-reel tape, listening to and recording messages. She represented the only unusual person in his early years. His school years were mundane, although he enjoyed social studies, speech, debating classes, and French. It wasn't until high school that life became exciting.

"It was the beginning of the 60s and change was percolating through the schools," Scott said. "I came from a well-established family; I slept in the same bedroom from 1949 to 1966. I had lived a very different life than my friends and peers who had moved around a lot and whose parents broke up. It was the early part of the counter-cultural experience, and going to concerts and anti-war demonstrations was exciting. We traveled everywhere to hear musicians like The Doors and Joan Baez."

Scott and a group of disaffected friends, who called themselves "Cynics," thought they had an inside track on what was happening. They listened to bluegrass music and read books like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl's assertion that Nazi death camp survivors created something to live for—whether it was the next spring or their children—left a lasting impression on him. He wanted to delve beneath the surface of the life he'd grown up with and realized meaning was more central to human experience than power or personal gratification.

Putting his beliefs to work, he helped publish *The Escalator*, an underground high school paper with the motto, "Escalate your mind, not the war." The editors were called into the principal's office and warned against distributing it at school. A friend with shoulder-length hair got picked on and called "faggot" by the high school football players and, when Scott defended him, they threatened to beat him up. By his junior year, he began dating his future wife, Kristin Champion, who lived three blocks away, and he had known since elementary school.

While attending the Methodist Church, Scott joined a youth leadership program and became a representative to the San Jose District

Youth Leadership Team. He cut class his senior year to hear Martin Luther King speak at Sproul Plaza, UC Berkeley, and attended services by Cecil Williams, in addition to attending anti-war and civil rights rallies, marches and talks. He wore a CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) button to class. In his senior year, he was elected student body president and immediately appointed previously unrepresented blacks, hippies and Latinos to student body commissions.

He saw that there was more to life than having a good time and, throughout high school, Scott worked and saved his money. Memorable jobs included working with his brother who drove a flower delivery truck. By his senior year, Scott worked two jobs, one at his father's tire store after school and in the summer, and at a Thrifty Drug Store at night. He claimed he "saved every nickel."

His religious involvement led him to consider a "calling to the ministry." After attending talks at church summer camp by conscientious objectors from W.W. II, Korea and Vietnam, he realized that Christianity rejects violence as a way to resolve conflicts. When he registered for the draft, he applied as a conscientious objector (C.O.).

"Applying for C.O. status was a watershed event in my life," said Scott. "It's difficult to step off the escalator of what's considered normal. The draft board turned down my application and I appealed. I have a vivid memory of going before my draft board and defending my case. They tried to talk me out of it.

"'You can go to the university or into the ministry and get a deferment,' the draft board said. 'Why go to all this trouble?' They suggested that I wait four years before making up my mind, and I told them that if they didn't give me the C.O. classification, I'd drop out of school and go to jail before going into the military. I wanted them to rule immediately. They gave me the deferment. It definitely set my life in a certain direction."

Scott graduated from high school in 1967 and, while many of his friends enrolled at San Jose State and UC Berkeley, he applied to Stanford and UCSC. Accepted at UCSC, Scott began as a philosophy major in 1967. He lived on campus and immediately continued his involvement in anti-war activities, including the National Mobilization in San Francisco. Although he didn't use drugs, he attended the Rolling Stones Concert "Woodstock West" at Altamont. He and his future wife, Kris, who also attended UCSC, demonstrated in support of People's

Park in Berkeley, and joined a UCSC delegation to Sacramento to meet with Governor Ronald Reagan about the park.

“We were in a room with Ronald Reagan and I had the definite impression that he was mad,” explained Scott. “He was disconnected and talked about the *San Jose Mercury* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* as being left-wing newspapers. He claimed that the National Guard shot James Rector in self-defense. Reagan stayed about 20 minutes and the repartee degenerated; we talked past each other. When it was over I stood up and could see that he was incredibly made up. I realized that we hadn’t been searched and anyone could have killed Reagan on the spot. I had a fantasy that behind the shelves in the room was another head and, if someone killed him, they would just put another head on him and he would go on to meet the next group. It gave me an insight into violence.”

When Eugene McCarthy ran for president, Scott helped rent a campaign headquarters in the Common Ground, an old garage across from the town clock in Santa Cruz, California. The town/gown divide was enormous back then, and Scott describes trips to downtown Santa Cruz as “field trips.” He helped organize a fast against the war on the steps of the post office and recalls Hal and Barbara Morris from Plaza Books bringing them blankets while others called them names. Some of the students supported Robert Kennedy, who Scott considered an opportunist for not opposing the Vietnam War, but the group ran a highly successful campaign for McCarthy.

Meanwhile Diane, his oldest sister, returned from Uruguay and attended Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, where she fell in love with James Pike, the retired Episcopal Bishop of California. Pike had already attracted attention for his liberal views; he opposed the war in Vietnam, supported civil rights and women’s ordination, and became an outspoken defender of gay rights. In January 1968, Scott drove to Santa Barbara with his parents to visit his sister and meet Pike, who was studying the Dead Sea Scrolls and working on a book about the historic Jesus, set in the context of first century Judaism.

Scott knew enough about the Scrolls to ask Pike questions and when Pike said he was planning a trip to the Middle East, Scott said he’d like to go. Pike encouraged him and, in the spring, Scott left school early to go on a five-week trip with his sister and Pike to visit the historic sites in Jesus’ life and to meet with Dead Sea Scroll scholars in Israel, France

and England. When they returned, Pike asked Scott to help him with his book and Scott, with the help of Cowell College Provost Page Smith, took the fall semester off.

Bishop Pike and Diane married in December 1968. In August, they returned to the Middle East for their honeymoon. Scott was 21 and traveling across the country to work in a settlement house in Appalachia when he got news that his sister was safe, but Bishop Pike was missing in the Judean desert.

“Even though I was the youngest, the family sent me to Jerusalem to support my sister, and the last two days I was part of the party searching for Pike’s body,” said Scott. “We found him on the fifth day. There have been all sorts of speculation about his death, but basically, I think he and my sister were impulsive. They did things no rational person would do. They rented a car and drove into the desert without water, hats, or any supplies. His death totally changed my whole orientation.”

When his sister recovered, he returned to Santa Barbara with her and, among her many projects, she insisted on finishing Pike’s book, although the book was only ten percent complete. Scott took a break from school to help her despite many interruptions. Bishop Pike had many friends, and everyday “some wacko priest who had lost his job, a shaman, or some guy claiming to be a count from the royal family of Bulgaria,” would knock on their door. Scott also accompanied Diane to various venues around the country where she went to fulfill dozens of speaking engagements previously scheduled by Bishop Pike.

The deaths of the students at Kent State upset them so severely that they could no longer work. They decided to move to Jerusalem for six months, where they rented two rooms in a hotel in East Jerusalem. They worked 16- to 18-hour days for three-week stints and then spent five days traveling to Galilee and other areas to visit historic and religious sites. Everyday Scott and Diane would take a bus into West Jerusalem to study Hebrew. Things suddenly changed in September 1970 when the Jordanian civil war began and King Hussein’s army crushed Palestinian forces in Jordan’s refugee camps.

“We came home one day and the Palestinian Christian family, with whom we were staying, confronted us,” Scott said. “They wanted to know how we, as Christians, could go into West Jerusalem every day and work and study with the Jews who were destroying their family.

Things ripped open. It had been all very civil up to that point, but our relations suddenly became raw during ‘Black September.’”

“Nasser died in Egypt. The Palestinians assassinated the Prime Minister of Jordan at Nasser’s funeral and started blowing up airplanes. I didn’t have a clue as to what was going on. This was a turning point; I turned away from my interest in the historic religious times of Jesus to what was going on around me. I started tracking contemporary affairs and, for thirty years, peace in the Middle East has remained one of my main interests.”

After working with James Pike and his sister on the book, Scott was elated to see, *The Wilderness Revolt*, published by Doubleday in 1972, when he was 24. He appreciated being taken seriously by Pike’s friends and others, but he found himself becoming impatient with his friends who didn’t understand that he wanted to make his own life count for something rather than frittering away his time with trivial distractions.

The university accepted the book as his senior thesis, and he graduated with a major in ancient history, although he spent much less time on campus than the average student. After graduation, one of Pike’s friends, William Stringfellow, a lawyer and Episcopal lay theologian, invited Scott to attend a weekend conference, entitled *The Gospel and America*, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. There he met Dan and Phil Berrigan, “Catholic left” activists against the war.

Scott returned to Isla Vista, near UC Santa Barbara, where he helped organize a similar West Coast conference for the Christian left, a Catholic Workers Movement in Los Angeles, and others involved in direct action against the war. Scott’s views on nonviolent social change were taking shape. After the conference, he and a group of friends decided to remain in Isla Vista.

“In 1973 a bunch of us started a community in Isla Vista that grew to sixteen people,” he said. “We started a nonviolence center and met every week to study nonviolence and build a base of support in the community. We experimented with intentional community, and brought films and speakers to the area. We invited a number of influential practitioners of nonviolence to the community: Lanza del Vasto, an Italian who set up a Gandhian Community, The Ark, in France; and Danilo Dolci, an Italian who resisted the Nazis and became a community

organizer in Sicily, where he helped to break the Mafia's 'code of silence.'”

In 1974, Scott and Kris were married. She was working on her master's degree and a teaching credential, and Scott informed his draft board that he was going to do his conscientious objector (C.O.) work in Isla Vista. Later that year, a Colonel showed up at his front door to question Scott about the thirty-five C.O.s who were supposed to be working in the area. Scott had never heard of any of them, but as a result, discovered that the draft system was in total disarray.

Most of the men in the Isla Vista group organized projects in the community, while most of the women held jobs on the outside. Although this arrangement worked well for the men, the women decided that Isla Vista was a student ghetto and a terrible place to raise children. The group decided to move and sent out expeditions to locate a more beneficial place to live. Because several members of the group were from UCSC or Northern California, they decided to disband and move to Santa Cruz.

Those interested in an intentional nonviolent community took time off and met in Santa Cruz the following year. In fall 1974, Scott accepted a Rockefeller-sponsored fellowship to study at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. Despite loving Berkeley and the course of study, Scott became disillusioned with the students.

“There were so many people in the seminary who didn't know what they were doing,” explained Scott. “I came out of a tradition of Christian activism and, in one class, our assignment was to keep a journal and write about ethical concerns. Some of the students said they couldn't think of anything to write about. I found so much to write about: What about tax resistance? Or driving your car? Or the use of energy resources? Life is full of ethical concerns.”

In 1975 Joan Baez asked Scott to become the director of the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, which she had founded in 1964 in Carmel Valley. The institute moved to Palo Alto when Baez married David Harris, president of the Stanford student body and a leader in the draft resistance movement. Joan asked Scott to become its director because internecine warfare threatened to destroy the institute. He wanted to wait until he finished school in June, but Joan insisted that the situation was grave.

Scott became part-time director, only to find a number of people in the group claimed allegiance to Baez, while others resented her notoriety. When dissenting members presented a list of demands at a board meeting, Scott urged her to accept them. Baez agreed to relinquish control of the institute, but with Baez gone, the opposition lost coherence and the center dissolved. Scott learned some valuable lessons that helped him in creating the Santa Cruz Resource Center for Nonviolence, which received an early boost of monthly support from Baez.

“People only get paid part time and, if we have more money, we spread it around to more people,” explained Scott. “We don’t want to create full-time peace bureaucrats and we don’t want to become staid and conservative, which happened anyway. Everyone works part time and everyone gets paid the same regardless of how long they work here. We make decisions by consensus and are egalitarian, although it’s obvious that someone who has been around for 25 years will have more influence than someone who started more recently. Our values reflect the counter culture and the anti-war movement. Some young people just don’t get it; the center grew out of the experiences that shaped us in the Vietnam anti-war and counter-culture movements.”

In 1976, at the end of a yearlong hiatus from Isla Vista, eight of the participants formed the nucleus of the Resource Center for Nonviolence in Santa Cruz. The group, which called themselves the Redwood Nonviolence Community, remained together and tithed ten percent of their income. They donated 75 percent of this to various causes and the remainder constituted a loan fund, which helped six of the group’s members buy houses, all within a few blocks of each other.

Weekly potlucks brought them together to discuss issues. The Redwood Nonviolence Community continues to meet, although Scott and Kris dropped out in 1999. During this time, Scott and Kris had three children, born in 1976, 1979 and 1982, and continued to live in a house they bought in Santa Cruz in 1976 for \$48,000. Kris became a schoolteacher, while Scott stayed home to care for their children and work at the Resource Center. In 1977, the group bought a building at 515 Broadway to house the Resource Center to promote nonviolence and provide a place for the community to gather when political issues convulsed the nation.

Not only does the Center provide a local focus for promoting peace, but through the years it has also influenced national issues. When the movement against nuclear power plants developed, the Resource Center pushed to include nuclear weapons. Although controversial at first, the two issues are linked today. The Center supported disarmament, and in 1980, qualified a measure for the Santa Cruz County ballot to outlaw the production of parts for nuclear weapons in the county, including the Lockheed plant on Empire Grade. Lockheed spent \$240,000 to defeat the measure, while the Campaign for a Nuclear-free Santa Cruz County operated on volunteer labor. Although defeated countywide, Santa Cruz was the first local jurisdiction to use the electoral process to try to ban nuclear weapons and became a model for the nationwide Nuclear Weapons Freeze Movement. The Center participated in demonstrations against the trident missile submarine, Lockheed, and nuclear weapons testing in Nevada.

“Santa Cruz may be a bubble, but we feel we contribute in our own small way to Santa Cruz being what it is,” Scott said. “There are fewer nuclear weapons now than at the height of the cold war, but more than we need. We aren’t so smart, and we have modest resources, with a staff of 20, but the anti-nuclear weapons movement is mainstream here. We got involved early in the move against intervention in Central America and helped build a network of people—Witness for Peace—to mobilize on the grass roots level against the war in Nicaragua. And we remain interested in peace in the Middle East.”

After the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, a number of people approached Scott to run for City Council. He resisted at first but his friends argued that his 25 years of participation on national boards such as the War Resisters League, the Fellowship for Reconciliation, Witness for Peace, and the Resource Center for Nonviolence, gave him unique skills. He served on the City Council from 1991 for eight years, one as mayor. After a break imposed by term limits, he returned to the Council in 2001-2003 with a second term as mayor in 2004.

“I’ve always combined idealism with opportunism and pragmatism,” Scott explained. “I don’t feel a disruption between my work at the Resource Center and the City Council. The Resource Center draws people who are moralistic and idealistic, and some of them were disappointed when I ran and won. They were disgusted with me participating in government, but I see it as having a synergy with what

we're trying to accomplish. Many of the values of the peace movement are well-suited for work on the Council.”

Despite criticism, Scott continued to reconcile many sides in disputes within the city. For example, during his first tenure, he concentrated on working with young people and bridging the gap with the Latino population. He fought to curb gang violence and drug use in Beach Flats, as well as to bring much needed street repair and lighting to the area. He supported the filing of multiple small claims against absentee landlords who neglected their property, which led to a \$45,000 judgment against them. He remained committed to bringing services to the homeless.

Although some criticized Scott for being too business-friendly and promoting development, he felt that before the earthquake progressive elected officials took business for granted and did nothing to assist this vital part of the community. The two groups, progressives and business people, warily considered each other. When the 1989 earthquake struck and the downtown needed to be rebuilt, Scott helped bring the two warring factions together, playing an important role in resolving conflicts between conservative and progressive forces in Santa Cruz.

“The progressive Santa Cruz leadership has achieved more glory for what it hasn't done than for what it has done,” explained Scott. “It prides itself for stopping development of Lighthouse Field and Wilder Ranch. But what about transportation problems? Everyone hates traffic congestion but will we be able to do anything to affect it? After a while people will say we have to do something. While I'm not in favor of widening Highway 1, we have to deal with the railroad corridor and find some creative solutions to our problems. While conservationists say no growth, we have to be aggressive to build affordable housing so people can afford to live here.”

The End
Copyright 2011